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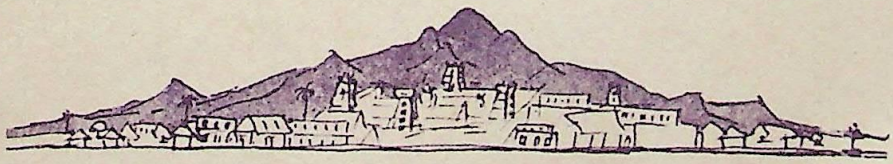

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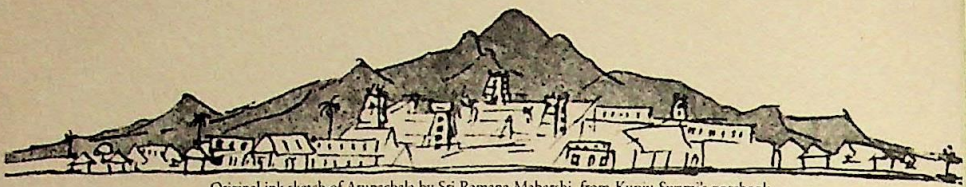

Original ink sketch of Arunachala by Sri Ramana Maharshi, from Kunju Swami's notebook

The Mountain Path

JAYANTI 2004

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Ashram Bulletin: M. Ravindra Narayanan
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THE MOUNTAIN PATH IS DEDICATED TO BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Published by Sri V.S. Ramanan, President, Board of Trustees, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai - 606603, India, and printed by Sri T.V. Venkataraman at Karthik Printers, 16 Aranganathan Subway Road, Chennai - 600015. Editor: Christopher Quilkey.

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CONTENTS

Ramana Ashtottaram 2

Editorial: Advaita 3

Keyword: Mano-Nasa 7

Growing Up in the Grace of Bhagavan: Monica Bose 9

Advaita Today: I. S. Madugula 17

'I' is a Door Part One: Philip Renard 23

Ulladu Narpadu Verse One: S. Ram Mohan 35

Bhagavan's Herbal Remedies 40

At Ramanasramam: S. Govind 41

Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam Commentary: Sadhu Om 53

Advaita Primer: T. S. Viswanatha Sharma 57

From the Notebooks: Robert Powell 61

Book Excerpt Turn Eastwards: Pascaline Mallet 63

Sorupa Saram: Sorupananda 75

Book Reviews 104

Ashram Dates 107

Ashram Bulletin 108

Afterword 112

Ramana Ashtottaram

12. *Ōm Sahāyāmbā sahāyavatē namaha.*

Prostration to one who enjoyed the help of Mother divine, the helper of all.

Sahayamba or Sahayavalli is the name of the Goddess of Tiruchuzhi. Once when he was a child, Bhagavan's father scolded him. Bhagavan left his house and ran off to the temple opposite and hid behind the Mother's image. In a moment he felt not only protected but also a thrill of profound joy which continued throughout his life.

13. *Ōm Ṣoṇāchala mahōlīna mānasāya namaha.*

Prostration to one whose mind was absorbed in the effulgence of Arunachala.

From childhood Bhagavan was fixated by the name, the light, the glory of Arunachala. When he heard from an uncle that he had visited Tiruvannamalai and seen Arunachala, Bhagavan was entranced by the word Arunachala, and the fact it did actually exist physically. Bhagavan himself mentions this in the very first verse of his *Arunachala Padigam*.

14. *Ōm Svarṇahastakāya namaha.*

Prostration to the one with a golden hand.

The very touch of young Ramana's hand used to bring good fortune to others. Hence he was referred to as *thangak kai* — "golden hand" by his relatives and neighbours. The same touch conferred invaluable awareness and bliss on anybody with whom it came into contact.

Jayanti

EDITORIAL

Advaita

THE term Advaita has been used by people with various agendas for their own purposes and it is in danger of losing its original meaning altogether. For a sincere enquirer to understand what Advaita means, a refined (*sattvic*) mind is required. For this to occur, unless the circumstances are extraordinary, a seeker needs to develop over time, by assiduous practice, the necessary subtlety of thought and right understanding. The pursuit of understanding is not solely a mental exercise, it demands all one's energy and dedication so that each aspect of one's life is in harmony with the right intention. Though we may pretend to understand, true knowledge is not semantics nor a philosophy. In the interests of explanation we could, in theory, call it a metaphysical doctrine because it opens up such unlimited possibilities of conception, but even this is not really it. Advaita is not an explanation, it is an experience. It cannot be restricted within any blueprint no matter how comprehensive. It is a fluent immediacy of understanding for which words are inadequate.

We can do no better than quote extensively from *Dialogues With The Guru* complied by R. Krishnaswami Aiyar in conversation with His Holiness Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Swaminah, Shankaracharya

of Sringeri Mutt from 1912 to 1954. His Holiness was recognized as an authority on the purest Vedantic orthodox doctrine.

Mr. R.: ...I shall be very grateful if your Holiness will be pleased to initiate me into the Advaita Vedanta yourself.

H.H.: I shall certainly be very glad to do so, if I can do it. But it is quite beyond my competence.

Mr. R.: I am sure Your holiness is not serious. If Your Holiness professes incompetence to teach Advaita, I do not see how anybody else in the world can claim to teach it.

H.H.: What can we do? It is the nature of the subject. The Upanishad itself proclaims, 'He who claims to know, knows not'. The Advaita is not something to be learnt; therefore it cannot be a thing to be taught. It is essentially something to be realized by oneself. I cannot therefore undertake to teach you. If, however, in the course of your Vedantic studies, you want any passage to be explained either in a text or in a commentary, I shall certainly try my best to explain it. I can thus help you only to understand the significance of words or of sentences which are composed of words, or of ideas which are conveyed by sentences. But it is impossible to convey to you a correct idea of what Advaita is, for it is neither a matter of words nor is it a mental concept. It is, on the other hand, pure experience which transcends all these. Suppose I do not know what sweetness is. Can you describe sweetness in words sufficiently expressive to convey an idea of sweetness to me?

Mr. R.: That is certainly impossible.

H.H.: Sweetness can be known only when I put some sweet thing on my tongue. It is impossible to be explained in words or to be learnt from another person. It has to be realized in direct experience. If a thing so familiar to us as sweetness transcends all expression, how much more transcendental will be the truth of Advaita, which is the supreme sweetness.[1]

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[1] *Dialogues With The Guru* complied by R. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Chetana, 1981 pp. 160-1.

Advaita is a *darshana* which means 'view' or a 'point of view'. The word comes from the root *drish* which means 'seeing'. It should not be construed as meaning a system. From the Vedic *rishis* to our modern day *rishi* Bhagavan Ramana, there is a long tradition of seers who directly *saw* the Supreme Truth. They did not think with the normal rational mind but they *saw* the Truth in all its power, rawness and beauty. Advaita is a report developed over the centuries to convey something of this phenomenon. It is reputed to be the best approximation that can describe the Supreme Reality.

It leads us through a mixture of cosmology, logic and metaphysics to an understanding of man's relationship with the universe and relationship to himself. We could say Advaita is not a target to be described but the arrow which directs us to see for ourselves the object of our search. Advaita tells us Truth is not a static object but a reality which only can be lived. There is in response a commitment demanded on a sincere seeker for whom no half-measures are appropriate. We should live it with all our heart.

To pursue this investigation into the nature of one's own reality there are certain requisite qualifications if the seeker is to be successful. This endeavour is not solely an intellectual pursuit but demands a dedicated life in every sense of the word. Firstly, we should develop discrimination between that which is unchanging from that which is ephemeral. "Lead me from darkness to light, lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from untruth to Truth" (Brih. Up.1.iii.28). Second, the discipline calls on us to renounce the fruits and enjoyment of this world we inhabit. When we become disillusioned due to our failure to be truly happy even if we have everything we could possibly desire, renunciation is the appropriate response. We ask why we suffer and this initiates a profound questioning of all our values which till now we took for granted. The dispassion generated from the suffering creates a detachment that helps us rise above the myriad waves of thoughts and emotions which in general, distract and relentlessly drive our lives.

The third requirement is moral correctness and sense of decency. We do not intentionally hurt others; we do not kill or steal whether

this refers to material objects or the immaterial as in a person's character which can be stolen by malicious gossip. We respect the rights of others. This is important because many people seem to think that if they are 'superior' souls then whatever they do is right and can be justified. We are powerfully reminded of Bhagavan's own attitude in the ashram. He gave himself neither rights nor privileges above others. He never claimed precedence.

There is an interesting story how one day Bhagavan happened to walk past when the Sarvadhikari had an altercation with the wandering *sadhus* who were fed daily in the front ashram courtyard. They were restive because their regular mid-morning *biksha* was not ready on time. The Sarvadhikari declared in frustration that from now on, the inmates would be fed before the outsiders. Bhagavan heard this and when the noon dinner bell rang, he was not to be found. All the ashram inmates and guests trooped into the dinning room but since Bhagavan was not in attendance, they could not start. After an awkward passage of time the Sarvadhikari sent people in search of Bhagavan. They could not immediately find him and a more intensive search followed. Bhagavan eventually was found at Palakothu, the *sadhu* hermitage area behind the ashram. When asked why he was sitting there, Bhagavan replied that since he was not a local (a reference to his having originally come from out of town), he was waiting for the insiders to finish eating. When the Sarvadhikari heard this he immediately rescinded the order and said from henceforth the outsiders would be fed before the ashramites (and that procedure is followed to this day). It was only then that Bhagavan came to the dining hall and ate lunch with the others. Bhagavan's sense of equality was the epitome of having no sense of individual ego.

The fourth qualification if one is to understand and live Advaita, is the longing for liberation. The path calls for a whole-hearted allegiance. Aside from the normal demands on a person to maintain their bodily and mental well-being, it requires all the seeker's energy and time. At first we dunk our toes in the waters to test the temperature and then summon up our reserves of courage

because we know eventually if we are to be true to the quest, it calls on us to dive completely into the waters.

What Advaita presents to us is not a way to accumulate knowledge so as to control the world around us or a certificate of self aggrandisment nor does it provide a diploma to teach others. The essential experience of Advaita means realising that there are no 'others' to teach. What it does offer is wisdom and a way to be spiritually free. ▲

KEYWORD

MANO-NASA

Sanskrit:

Manas: mind, mental faculty, individual thought; *Nasa*: destruction.

Bhagavan teaches us to be aware that underlying the unceasing flow of thoughts, is the sense of 'I' as a continuous, unbroken awareness. It is silent, that is, without form and spontaneous (*sphurana)*.

Whatever thoughts arise as obstacles to *sadhana* (spiritual discipline), the mind, the sense of identification with body, should not be allowed to go in the direction of appearances, but should rest in one's sense of 'I'.

Bhagavan asks us to remain as witness to whatever happens and adopt an inquisitive attitude by not being afraid and dispassionately observe whatever occurs in the mind. One should remain absorbed in the sense of 'I' and not identify oneself with appearances, for

thought is bondage. "This is the proper means for destruction of the mind (*manonasa*)."[1] "Whence does this 'I' arise? Seek this within. This 'I' then *vanishes*. This is the pursuit of wisdom. *Where the 'I' vanished*, there appears an 'I-I' by itself. This is the infinite [*poornam*]."[2]

In the above verse the verb, 'vanishes' is a translation of the Tamil phrase *talai-sayndidum*, which literally means, 'will bow its head'. In ordinary usage it means 'will humble itself', 'sinks crestfallen', or 'will bow its head in shame'. However, in colloquial usage it can also mean 'will die'.[3]

The same verse when translated into English from Bhagavan's Sanskrit version can read as follows:

"Where this 'I' *vanished and merged* in its source, there appears spontaneously and continuously an 'I-I'. This is the Heart, the infinite Supreme Being."[4] Alan Chadwick translated the same verse of *Upadesa Saram* into English, and Bhagavan corrected the manuscript. Bhagavan approved in this version the word 'disappears' as a translation of the word *nasa*: "This search pursued till 'I' has *disappeared*/There now vibrates the 'I-I' all alone,/The quest is finished, there's no more to seek./For this is really the Infinite Self."

Discrimination is necessary between temporary quiescence of mind during sleep or subsidence in *yoga nidra* when there is a seeming absence of mind, and the complete destruction of identification with the mind: "Absorption (of mind) is of two kinds: *laya* (temporary stillness) and *nasa* (permanent destruction). That which is absorbed merely in *laya* will rise again, (but) if its form dies (in *nasa*), it will not rise again."[5]

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[1] See *Self-enquiry*, section 4. trans. T.M.P. Mahadevan.

[2] *Upadesa Undiyar*, verses 19 and 20.

[3] See " 'I' and 'I-I': a Reader's Query" by D. Godman in *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 28, No. 1&2, June 1991; pp. 79-88.

[4] *Upadesa Saram*, verse 20. Also see *Sri Maharshi's Way*, a translation of *Upadesa Saram* by D. M. Sastri, 1989 ed., p. 38.

[5] *Upadesa Undiyar*, v. 13.

Growing up in the Grace of Bhagavan

Childhood Memories

MONICA BOSE

I was eleven years old when my mother brought my grandmother and myself, newly arrived from England, into the presence of Bhagavan at the Sri Ramanasramam. I saw him sitting there before us on a sofa in a long narrow hall. He was an elderly clean-shaven man, fair of complexion and with wonderful eyes. When he saw us he smiled sweetly as if to say 'So you have reached safely.' My grandmother, Jeanne, and myself had been living in England, where my father wanted me to be educated. But when war broke out and the Battle of Britain got under way, my mother, who was known in India as Sujata, urged us to come back to India. She herself had come to Tiruvannamalai in 1936 to visit Bhagavan and had stayed on ever since. Very worried about our safety in wartime, she had a dream in which she saw Bhagavan sitting on the threshold of our house in Brighton with one hand raised in the sign of protection. I had been a little afraid of coming before the great Master my mother had described to us in her letters. But from the first I felt happy and

Monica Bose recently wrote a biography of her remarkable mother, Sujata Sen, entitled *Hill of Fire*. An excerpt was published in the Aradhana issue of *The Mountain Path*. She lives in London.

safe in his presence, and even out of his presence when I mentally invoked him. There was a great power in him but also an unfailing responsiveness to those who raised their thoughts to him.

There was an 'isness' about him. Whatever he did, such as correcting proofs of a book, or suggesting the replies to letters, or feeding the squirrels who came to him for their nuts, or answering the questions put to him by visitors or devotees, or sitting in potent silence, there was no effort on his part to be this or that, nor to create an impression on others. Self-realised, Bhagavan just was because he lived in pure Being. The calm of that mind-state of no duality, no conflict, was felt by the devotees. "The inner peace that is his is transmitted to us all," wrote a friend of ours, Pauline Noyé, when she returned to America from Tiruvannamalai. In the hall the women sat on Bhagavan's left, and the men before him. Each one brought his or her little mat on which to sit on the floor of Cuddapah tiles. Whilst most people meditated, I just imagined myself to be the receptacle of the power he emanated. When I knew more about his teaching I started trying to concentrate my mind on the 'I am' in the Heart which links us with the 'I am' of all that is. After a time, the single thought 'I am' becomes pure feeling.

There was a great power in him but also an unfailing responsiveness to those who raised their thoughts to him

The atmosphere in the hall was relaxed. If there was a noise, say a child's cry before it was hushed by the parent, or the greeting exchanged between friends, there was no reprimand, no stern eye turned towards them. People were quiet out of respect for the Master whose supreme teaching was communicated by silence. There was a delightful little girl called Lalitha who was a bit naughty. Bhagavan was very fond of her, as he generally was of children. One day she was going around touching papers and other things, her embarrassed mother exclaimed, "Lalitha what are you doing?" To

which she replied, "I'm not doing anything." The Maharshi commented, "You see how the truth is uttered instinctively by children. I, in truth, does not do anything, it is the higher Self that acts." Thus Bhagavan gave a lesson on surrender which is the first step on the path to Self-realisation.

For the next nine years I was to visit the ashram during my holidays from school in Bangalore and later from college in Madras. In all that time I never saw or heard anything to belie my first impression of Bhagavan's uniqueness and greatness. Nor was I ever bored at the ashram. No day was the same. People brought here their talent in writing or reciting scripture, or singing sacred songs. They brought their doubts, troubles, griefs and also joys. I remember a middle-aged couple who proudly sat in the hall with their baby boy whom they had called Ramana. The way they looked with adoration and gratitude at Bhagavan indicated that they believed he had granted them the boon of a child when all hope had gone. Bhagavan always denied that he performed miracles, but there were many accounts of how he had healed someone, even at a distance, and sometimes it seemed even without the knowledge of Bhagavan himself. An old family friend, C. Seshadri, the Librarian at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, told me that two of his friends from Calcutta travelled South to visit Madurai. They regretted that they had come to hear of Bhagavan too late to plan a visit to him. As it happened, at a junction they missed their train and in the morning they boarded a train which took them not to Madurai but to Tiruvannamalai. And when the Maharshi saw them he said, "Weren't you supposed to come yesterday?" Among the personal 'miracles' I experienced, I can speak of the times I asked for Bhagavan's help when there was a particularly difficult time ahead. Not only would I feel his protection but it seemed to me that it lasted a little beyond the time in question. Years later I read of another devotee who had similar experiences of 'overlapping' protection.

Then, I did not give it a thought, but now, I talk to people who are surprised that there was no room other than the hall where Bhagavan could withdraw from the public gaze. He was always

there for us. And this is linked to what was of paramount importance for him — the giving of *darshan*. He maintained the darshan even when he was very ill and in great pain. Traditionally, darshan, for a Jnani, means giving himself to be seen by others so that they might obtain contact with the Reality he embodies. Some devotees spoke of having glimpses of truth in Bhagavan's presence, for others there might be a slow maturation of understanding. Physical sight was not imperative. Once an old woman came up to Bhagavan and lamenting that she could not see properly asked Bhagavan to bless her so that she might see him in her mind. With compassion Bhagavan acquiesced. It is an incident that was a comfort to those whose sight was impaired, and indeed still is to those who did not have the chance to physically see the Maharshi. And the devotees wanted not only to see Bhagavan but also to be seen by him. In response, Bhagavan bestowed on them the Master's look of awareness and grace. I was a child, but even when the hall was filled with people, Bhagavan would for a moment look at me directly, turning his radiant gaze on me as well.

The first time that I came to the Ashram I wore a European style dress and did so on our daily visits to the Ashram until I was in my teens. One day I shyly appeared dressed in a saree. Bhagavan, who never commented on anyone's attire, said most unexpectedly that I should always wear a saree. This was not a banal remark, none of the Sage's remarks were. For I had come to India when I was already too old to learn any of its arts or pick up an Indian language properly. It seemed to me that in India I was a misfit. In effect Bhagavan was telling me to assume an Indian identity. Which I did. Indeed, when my mother took me straight to Bhagavan on our arrival from abroad, she led me to what was the most precious in the Indian heritage, the tradition of the ancient seers and their intuitive discrimination of Reality from falsehood. That tradition was inclusive for it excluded no-one from seeking the ultimate truth of himself or herself. The Maharshi's reply taught me how Self-enquiry was to begin for me, which was to first establish who I was in this world. The Maharshi's teaching was very lofty and sublime, yet just as a mountain rises

from the ground, it never lost touch with the earthly reality, in which the individual lives, grows, and strives to reach the heights.

Behind Bhagavan there was a window through which we could see the Hill Arunachala. It has long been worshipped as the Mark of Absolute Consciousness, the infinite and undying Self. There was a mystical union between the Hill and Bhagavan. Since childhood Venkataraman had felt its influence, but it was after Self-Realisation, when he answered its summons and drew close, that he knew the Hill was essentially one with him. For years he represented its nature introducing us gently to the awesome mystery of Absolute Being. I know how immensely fortunate we were to have been there with Bhagavan, who made Eternal Life more accessible to us by his life on earth. Yet, limitations of time and place do not really exist, and Bhagavan is still there, as many have experienced.

We lived very close to the sacred Hill. My mother, Sujata (Suzanne Alexandra Sen née Curtil) was an MD, DTM from the Sorbonne. She used her medical skills to treat the sick in Tiruvannamalai and its surrounding villages. Her town dispensary was situated at No. 58 Big Street, which was near to the road encircling the Hill. I got to know the Hill's different aspects. Early in the morning, as it towered above us, I saw it glow red. Aruna Achala, the Dawn Hill, is where the soul's darkness is dispelled and luminous Self-awareness shines forth. I saw the spectacular celebration of Shiva's legendary manifestation here as an infinite Pillar of Fire, held on the last night of the Karthikai festival when a huge beacon was lit on the Hill's summit. On some monsoon nights I saw it stand thrillingly tall, dark and mysterious behind a swirling mantle of white mist, evoking primordial Reality still unknown, awaiting the seers and sages who were to see and reveal it. My first article published when I was fourteen was about Bhagavan, the Hill Arunachala and the temple town of Tiruvannamalai, reflecting how important they already were to me. Bhagavan wrote in his own hand numerous verses glorifing Arunachala. He did so in notebooks, or on small slips of paper, especially if a translation or explanation had been requested of him. During the twenty-three years that he lived in the Hill's caves

he wrote hundreds of notes, but sadly most were lost. Later on at the ashram the notes he wrote were much in demand among the devotees, but seeing that they vied for their possession Bhagavan practically stopped writing them. The devotees, though, continued to write notes to him. In 1942, my grandmother, who felt that she was losing her sense of purpose in life, wrote him a note asking him for guidance about her future. With extraordinary insight, he told her to return to her religion. She had never confided to anyone at the ashram that she had left it. She was to return to the Catholic faith and this would be the turning point in her life. During the twenty-three years left of her long pilgrimage on earth, she walked ever closer to Christ, her Lord. After I had passed the Intermediate Science examination, it was my turn to write a note to Bhagavan. In it I asked whether I should go on to study medicine. It was my father's wish for me but I felt I did not have an aptitude for the profession; on the other hand, I did not want to give up what had been my ideal because of a crisis of confidence. Bhagavan read the note, smiled and said in Tamil to the attendant who translated for me. "Whatever she chooses will be the right decision." I made up my mind not to read medicine and I know now that that was the right choice. The Sage did not tell me what to do. I was to grow up, follow my own inclination and rely on my own judgement, something as necessary to a successful career as it is to a fulfilling *sadhana*. One day in 1949, I was early and sitting alone in the newly constructed hall, when Bhagavan came in and took his place on the polished granite couch. He looked around

The Sage did not tell me what to do. I was to grow up, follow my own inclination and rely on my own judgement, something as necessary to a successful career as it is to a fulfilling *sadhana*

at the beautiful, perhaps in his eyes ostentatious surroundings, with a expression of distaste. He had been happiest I thought in the plain old hall, and before that in the caves where his couch had been a platform made of earth and stone. But the look of distaste lasted only for an instant. I saw him gather his thoughts to a point within and complete serenity returned to his features. When I left the hall, I met Mr Arthur Osborne, later editor of *The Mountain Path*, and told him what I had seen. He looked happy and thanked me. I was surprised because I had been a little troubled by the incident since I thought a Jnani was beyond likes and dislikes. I am afraid my thinking was somewhat on the lines of the person who asked Bhagavan whether a Jnani felt any pain. "Why not," Bhagavan replied, "Does a Jnani not feel it when he is pricked with a pin?" A Jnani is not insensient, but what makes him different from others is that he does not associate himself with the pain or circumstance. He transcends it by immersing himself in the Self, as we must learn to do.

The end of Bhagavan's life in this world of form was approaching. He was now in the terminal stage of sarcoma. After the celebration of his 70th birthday, on 5th January 1950, his condition deteriorated so rapidly that he was moved to a specially constructed one-room cottage where nursing was easier. In this starkly simple setting his Mahasamadhi would take place.

I visited Tiruvannamalai briefly in the middle of March 1950. On the morning of my return to Madras I came to take my leave of Bhagavan. It was to be for the last time. As he lay in the room of the cottage facing the open doorway, the devotees filed past to get his darshan. When it came to my turn to stand before the doorway I was startled — his face as he looked at me was transfigured with love. I had often seen him look tender or compassionate during the many years that I had known him, but I had never seen him look as he did now. In his poor spent body there was this supreme passionless love, burning like a flame. For me that sight was Bhagavan's last gift of grace to me and it is still with me, vivid and vital to this day.

▲

Advaita Today

I.S. Madugula

As I sit on the patio of my modest condo in Palm Springs, California, I have an excellent view of the surrounding San Jacinto mountains about a mile or so away, their red and brown slopes sometimes reflected and sometimes camouflaged by the sunlight. My thoughts then invariably turn to Arunachala, to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi...and to advaita. Advaita in affluent America? Poverty is not a pre-requisite for philosophy, and the Self knows no territorial boundaries. In the Third Millennium C.E.? Why not? Nothing has changed over the millennia in human behavior or the human condition.

This article explores the relevance of advaita to the modern person, Mr./Ms. Everyone.

First of all, it is otiose to think of advaita as time-bound or space-bound, for it is not a creed, or dogma, or faith practised by certain

Dr. Indusekhara Sastri Madugula taught at Andhra University, Waltair, and the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. A longtime contributor to *The Mountain Path*, he now lives in Palm Springs, California, USA.

people at a certain time. It defines the very core of human existence, its basis, and its understanding. It is 'knowledge' in the highest sense of the term, knowledge that enables us to look inward and come to grips with who we are. An ad for advaita would truthfully include the slogan 'Back to Basics!' implying the need for the analysis of one's own origins, the origins of the universe, the Intelligence behind it, the Consciousness that pervades it, the Self. It is not a fad or fashion to change with passing time. It is a fact of life and is therefore coterminous with life. *All* life, that is. Not just yours or mine. Philosophers might modify it or mitigate it to suit their purposes and in accordance with their own understanding and the abilities of their audiences, but it forever remains the basis of existence and Reality. Dvaita, dualism, is apparent; advaita, the substratum of Consciousness, is real.

Advaita is better translated as non-dualism rather than monism, in order to properly emphasize the fact that life as we know it is full of dualities and 'pairs of opposites' and name and form, the connecting thread behind all of which is the notion that Consciousness is unitary. Existence is diverse, but its essence is unified. No other analysis of life makes sense.

What are the parameters of modern life, insofar as they differ from earlier times? There is clearly more stress, especially in the urban jungle. There is generally an increased tempo to living routine life. There is perhaps greater competition, greater aggression, greater self-centeredness, colloquially expressed as 'I, Me, and Myself.' Too bad that these three pronouns, or rather the three forms of the first personal pronoun, are used in a totally egotistic way, instead of referring to the transcendental Being.

Note that advaita is needed as a corrective to these increasing trends to remind people of who they are and what their quest ought to be whether or not there is an increase in these negative characteristics of modern life. If there is a deterioration of the 'quality of life,' then certainly it would help to remember our divine origin. If we argue that people are always the same, with the same problems and pseudo-solutions, we would need the knowledge of the spirit as

much as we always have. In other words, there is no time when we can afford to forget our real selves as emanating from and partaking of the divine.

What has been the one characteristic desire of all beings, without exception, since the beginning of creation and still is? Undoubtedly, it has got to be the desire for happiness. It is in the pursuit of happiness, various acts good and bad are committed and various tendencies, latent or apparent, manifest themselves. However, there doesn't seem to be a consensus regarding what constitutes happiness.

We lead a crazy life under the best of circumstances. Money we acquire, and it doesn't buy us happiness. Power we seek, and in the course of its enjoyment, we make enemies. Sex we crave, though we know even before we indulge that it is highly overrated, and involves a willing suspension of disgust. What then is the basic underlying reason for human activity? Funny thing is, no one seems to think to ask this question during the activity. If one did, it wouldn't be hard to realize that, when it is not downright wasteful, its results are fleeting. We readily forget that death is our only birthright and we don't even have to *do* anything to claim it. We are not badmouthing action as such; we are only highlighting the need for self-analysis and the analysis of the world as we know it. And this is exactly where advaita comes in.

The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary defines advaita thus:[1]

a. 1. not dual; of one or uniform nature, equable, unchanging; 2. matchless, peerless; sole, unique. [n.] 1. non-duality, identity; esp. that of Brahma with the universe or with the soul, or soul and matter; 2. the Supreme or the highest truth or Brahma itself.

It appears that advaita has to do with a certain unity, a reassuring unity amidst baffling diversity, if you will. The world's six plus billion people can be looked upon as that many disparate entities or as a single species characterized by a single feature called humanness. Similarly everything we see or know of in the universe can either be

[1] V. S. Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), Reprint 2000.

a meaningless medley of life or a differentiated expression of the same unitary consciousness. Consciousness is the unifying principle in the universe, shared by the different species in different degrees. We humans believe that we are the pinnacle of this power, this Awareness. What follows therefore is that each of us must be able to realize it. Theoretically, since we are part of this creation and creation is steeped in consciousness, each of us should have no problem realizing our true conscious nature. Unfortunately, in practice, this is easier said than done, thanks to one of our most complex faculties called mind. While mind and consciousness are subjects of perennial quest, here is a working definition of *mind* from the *American Heritage Dictionary*:[2]

n. 1. The human consciousness that originates in the brain and is manifested, esp. in thought, perception, emotion, will, memory, and imagination.

In practice, the mind seems to generate certain notions as part of its thinking process:

1. We *think* that we are seeing, doing, hearing, touching, feeling, acting, etc. In other words, the activities of the senses are seen as the activity of the mind.

2. Similarly, we *think* that we suffer the consequences of actions or events.

It is this habit of *thinking* that seems to create the impression in us that we are either acting or suffering as individual entities. This may be tentatively termed 'the *Agent-Patient Fallacy.*' This fallacy is so powerful that even Descartes was misled into making his famous statement, *cogito, ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am. Just like one pinches oneself after a dream to establish one's reality, Descartes believed that one needs to think to realize that one exists.

But one question that people fail to ask is, "Who is acting/suffering? Who is watching the person that is acting/suffering?" If they do, then it will be clear that the one who asking is different

[2] *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

from the one who is suffering. The one who oversees, the seer, does not partake of the suffering or is affected by it. This is the crux of advaita, the governing principle of the discriminating individual.

Advaita is portable, not being an onerous set of dogmas, rituals, or other kind of baggage that a religion is normally expected to carry. It is not even a philosophy, though it is often referred to as such. It is in the ultimate analysis a mindset where there is no mind. This no-mind mindset comprises certain affirmations:

- The happy person is he who is not attached emotionally to anything or anyone. Absent attachment, all desire disappears. Total and genuine lack of attachment and desire is the formula for instant happiness. The arch-advaitin, Sankara, says that we should look upon the world as if it were the droppings of a crow.
- One chooses one's level of existence from among body-based, mind-based, and spirit-based potentialities. The body-based ones are at the lowest level, very close to our animal instincts. The second level ones result in art, poetry, music, and other finer products of the imagination. The highest level, that of the spirit, almost entails a suppression or transcendence of the other two. Blessed is the one who is untouched by them or who has sublimated them into a life of the spirit, a Bhagavan.
- One who is oblivious of the body and devoid of the mind soon realizes that the spirit is both the substratum and the continuum of all existence. After all, the best part of the human personality is the mind, and better still is the spirit that animates it. Bereft of the spirit, a beautiful body is only a beautiful corpse, if there is such a thing.
- The enlightened one says: I am that spirit, the ultimate entity, the Reality, the Sublime Truth. I am indivisible and non-different from anyone or anything in creation. Self-realization is the effulgent I-awareness uncontaminated by the lower-level mind-based consciousness.
- The world of name and form is existent only in a limited sense, that is, it exists only if you *think* so and *only as long as you* think so. Nothing exists in sleep to the person who is sleeping, that is, whose mind is shut down.

• No matter where the mind goes, there is only the ego-less I in reality, because nothing else exists. You achieve oneness with That when you discriminate between the forever and the fleeting.

To be an advaitin is the easiest thing in the world. To be a worldly being engrossed in some avocation or other is much harder. You are an advaitin when you don't think, when you don't act, when you just don't; you have fallen from this sublime state when you start doing things of any sort. However, we all know that we have got to do things, and the advaitin doesn't deny it. The advaitin does things *for the sake of doing them*, that is, without involvement and without claiming agency. Things happen and the advaitin is only instrumental, without being tarnished by thoughts of their outcome.

Life, as they say, is full of choices belonging to higher or lower orders. We can choose the higher realms or the lower ones, the good or the bad, love or hate. Our choice defines our disposition as well as our pre-disposition to understanding our Being.

To practise advaita, you don't have to join a club or cult or sect, or retire from the world. You can do that here and now. Train your mind to eliminate itself from the picture. It is a lesser faculty whose purpose is served once it renders itself inoperative. Then shines the *real* you, your *Self*, as Sankara would say, like the sun emerging from the clouds.

No special time or place is needed for such a practice, either. Sit or stand still and, more importantly, keep your mind still as long as possible. We do this naturally some time or other during the course of the day doing ordinary things. We focus, we concentrate, we ruminate on certain problems as they come up. We only need to do this more often and more concertedly. This is the only *natural* philosophy, *natural* way of life. Everything else is coloured by the mind and its diabolic dance. It helps to remember that all of us are advaitins to a greater or lesser degree, whether we know it or not, for the very reason that is a natural attribute of living. As we live, we can't help living advaita however marginally, because it is a natural part of life.

So, then, if one asks the question "Is advaita relevant today?" it may appropriately be answered with another question, "Is existence relevant today?"

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'I' is a door

On the entrance presented in 20th-century Advaita

Part One: Ramana Maharshi

PHILIP RENARD

ONE of the expressions most often heard of on the path to Self-realisation is 'letting go of the ego'. What exactly is meant by this?

It is not of course about the commonplace form of ego which everybody recognizes as egoity or selfishness because it is clear that selfishness is in fact rejected by everybody, even those who are not following a spiritual path. The letting go of this 'gross' kind of ego is not enough on the path of liberation.

The ego, as mentioned by the teachers of the ways for liberation as being the primary obstacle, is a thinking activity which projects oneself by identification with an external object, which consequently is seen and judged. A figure what is more, which is appraised by continual assessment with other so-called independent figures, as being higher or lower than oneself.

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This ego in fact consists of acts of comparison. It is also called 'self-consciousness' with all its implied inhibition of spontaneity or aliveness. It refers to the built-in split, a groove of habit which looks at another part of the same ego from a critical point of view, and bombards it with conflicting opinions. The principal characteristic of the ego is the *attachment* to the opinions about oneself. That is to say, a self-image has been built that does not want to dissolve and would rather continue as it is. This is what we call the 'person'; it is the maintenance of a self-image. When it comes to the 'person', each conscious activity of the body-mind involves the supposition there is an 'I' *doing* something, and that this 'I' is a continuous, enduring entity.

I prefer to call this 'the I', rather than 'ego', because this is easier to recognize as being something more subtle than the 'gross ego' earlier mentioned, even though the two flow into one another. The main difference, one could say, with the 'gross' ego it is others that bother you and are bothered by you, whereas in case of this subtle 'I', it is you being bothered by yourself.

Both Buddhists and Vedantists agree that this 'I' should be given up if you want liberation but disagree about the terminology and how belief in this 'I' can be annihilated. Buddhists say: "There is no entity at all, no 'self' or 'I', just a sequence of causatively conditioned psychic and physical processes." For the rest they do not talk about an 'I'. They even disapprove of talking in terms of 'I', for instance: "When we regard the nature of this knowing as being 'me' or 'I', and hold onto that concept – this is a small view, and it is confused, mistaken."[1]

In contradistinction, while the teachers of the Advaita Vedanta fully agree with the Buddhists upon the non-existence of the 'I'-entity, nevertheless they keep on talking in terms of 'self' and 'I', even when pointing to higher levels of reality. Why is this so?

General note: *italics* in quotes from Sri Ramana are mine; PhR.

[1] Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Drubwang, *Carefree Dignity*. Discourses on Training in the Nature of Mind. Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe, 1998; p. 31.

We shall try to give an answer in the light of the 'great triad' of twentieth-century Advaita teachers: Ramana Maharshi, Krishna Menon (Atmananda) and Nisargadatta Maharaj. All three use the word 'I' to indicate the highest (or nearly highest) principle, respectively as 'I, I', 'I-Principle' and 'I Am-ness'. This may be seen from the viewpoint of their rejection of 'the I' as a reality, which could easily give rise to misunderstanding due to the inadequacy of language.

Ananda Mayi Ma called him 'the Sun'

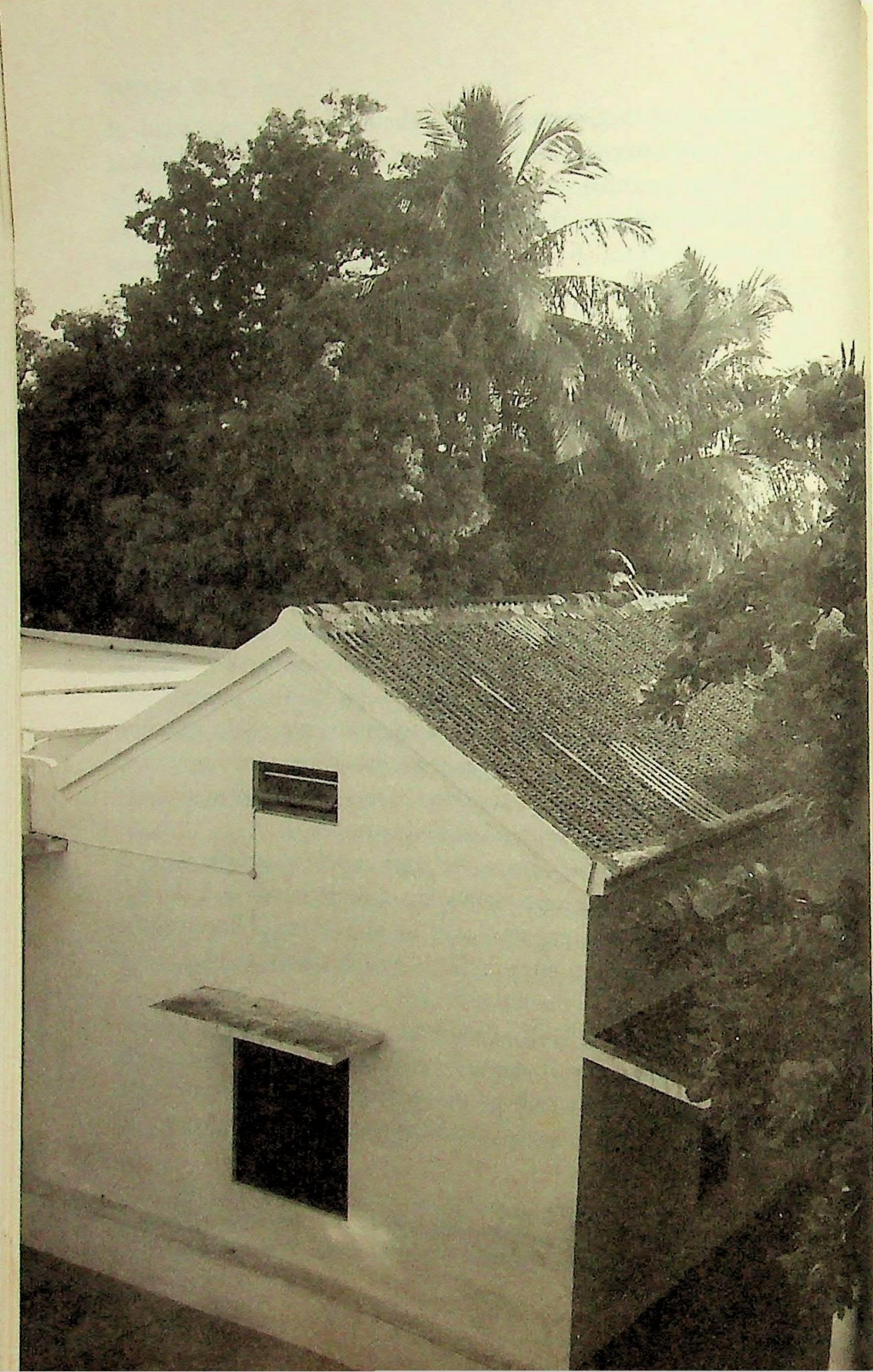
Let us first listen to the most senior of the three, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He has had the strongest influence and not for nothing Ananda Mayi Ma called him 'the Sun'.[2] He has been recognized as the authentic voice of Advaita and its message of the possibility of being liberated in this lifetime.

Everything in his teaching dealt with the true meaning of 'I'. He invited the visitor or devotee who requested guidance to ask themselves the question 'Who am I?' He considered this the true form of self-enquiry (*vichara*). He revealed the powerful nature of the question that when properly asked, it causes the dissolving of thoughts and identifications. Bhagavan let the effect of the question *be experienced* directly on the devotee who asked for guidance.

Yet he also understood that for most people the experience in itself required also the right foundation of understanding. The *right interpretation* of the experience is as important. Therefore he repeatedly explained in great detail the relation between 'the I' and that which is really 'I', the ultimate 'Self'.

He indicated that 'the I' (*aham-kara*), or the 'I'-thought (*aham-vritti*) as he often called it, has to be *killed*, destroyed. I have always thought this is a very tricky linguistic usage, because it seems to invite conflict. Generally a person is already engaged with struggles within

[2] "He was the Sun, and we are its rays." See in *Dattatreya: Glory of the Divine in Man*, final page of chapter 'The Descent of the Divine.' Vidyanagar 1981.



themselves and I think this aggressive terminology requires an explanation. If ultimately, the goal is peace, then the escalation of the inner conflict cannot be the intention.

Sri Ramana himself too spoke differently. If someone asked *how* this 'I' should be eliminated, he said for instance: "You need not eliminate the wrong 'I'. How can 'I' eliminate itself? All that you need to do is to find out its origin and abide there."[3] And at some other time he said about killing the ego: "Can the ego ever agree to kill itself? ... If you seek the ego you will find it does not exist.That is the way to destroy it."[4] And: "How can anything that does not exist be killed?"[5]

'You will find it does not exist'. This is again and again the essence of his argument. Nevertheless Sri Ramana often talks about the 'I', and describes it as if it exists, so one starts to wonder: 'but then *what* does exist, and what does not?' The following quotation is pertinent in this respect.

"There is the absolute Self from which a spark proceeds as from fire. The spark is called the ego. In the case of an ignorant man it identifies itself simultaneously with an object as it rises. *It cannot remain independent of such association with objects.* This association is *ajnana* or ignorance, whose destruction is the objective of our efforts. If its objectifying tendency is killed *it remains pure*, and also merges into the source."[6] If again we ignore the usage of the word 'killing' for a moment, the 'association with objects' mentioned above is the key phrase — the tendency of the 'I' to identify itself with objects. *That* is exactly the mistake.

What is associated with what? What or who is making this mistake? Ramana Maharshi repeatedly speaks about the association as being a 'knot' (*granthi*), the 'knot in the Heart'.

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[3] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.* Three volumes in one. Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu): Sri Ramanasramam, 1955; Talk 197.

[4] *ibid.*, Talk 615.

[5] *ibid.*, Talk 328.

[6] *ibid.*, Talk 286; also see the slightly deviating translation in *Maharshi's Gospel.* Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam, 1939; 6th edition, 1957; p. 26-27.

"Though this insentient body cannot say 'I' (i.e. does not have the feeling 'I'), and though Existence-Consciousness (*Sat-Chit*, Self) has no rising and setting, between these two rises an 'I' of the measure of the body (the 'I am the body'-identification). Know this alone to be the knot between Consciousness and the insentient (*Chit-jada-granthi*), bondage (*bandha*), soul (*jiva*), subtle body (*sukshma sharira*), ego (*ahamkara*), this mundane state of activities (*samsara*), mind (*manas*) and so on."[7]

Ramana says this knot must be cut. Again: what is meant by this act of seeming violence? In fact it always turns out what is meant is *sheer looking*. Just looking. You always thought you already were looking, but now you are requested to look as if you would look for the very first time. If you follow this instruction you would observe where this 'I-person' (which is what is meant by the term 'knot') really is. Where do I find this 'I-person'?

Ramana used a wonderful example to illustrate this.

"(The ego) is an intangible link between the body and Pure Consciousness. It is not real. So long as one does not look closely it continues to give trouble. But when one looks for it, it is found not to exist. Again, in a Hindu marriage function, the feasts continue five or six days. A stranger was mistaken for the best man by the bride's party and they therefore treated him with special regard. Seeing him treated with special regard by the bride's party, the bridegroom's party considered him to be some man of importance related to the bride's party and therefore they too showed him special respect. The stranger had altogether a happy time of it. He was also all along aware of the real situation. On one occasion the groom's party wanted to refer to him on some point. They asked for him. He scented trouble and made himself scarce. So it is with the ego. If looked for, it disappears."[8]

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[7] *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses), Verse 24. Translated by Sri Sadhu Om, in his *The Path of Sri Ramana*; Part One. Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramana Kshetra, 1971; p. 60. Capitals are added to conform to the usage in the quote of note 9.

[8] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 612.

Because Consciousness connects with the insentient matter, the spark which rises from Consciousness apparently makes the mistake and immediately clings to this connection with the insentient. This is called an 'attachment'. By closely paying attention to see whether this bond is indeed real, it becomes apparent nothing is there at all. Hence the 'I' exists owing to the fact it is not investigated.

This is one viewpoint. The emphasis is on the *ending* of something (this is why terms such as 'destroying' are used), by the seeing of the *non-existence* of something. There is another aspect as well, a more essential aspect as far as I am concerned. In the terminology that something has to be ended first ('seen through', 'killed' etc), there is the possibility after all to interpret it as an event in time, a sequence. 'First this, and only then there is freedom', seems to be the message. It is clear to me that in fact Sri Ramana emphasizes as much the always-present, self-luminous aspect within 'I' – *that which is already now present and available in me.* In spite of the knot Consciousness has made with its object, the physical body, Consciousness as such has continuously remained pure and not entangled with anything whatsoever. We are invited to recognize and understand that in fact the 'I' always has been 'made' of Consciousness as such.

The 'I' exists owing to the fact it is not investigated

"The ego functions as the knot between the Self, which is pure Consciousness (*Chit*), and the physical body, which is inert and insentient (*jada*). The ego is therefore called the *Chit-jada granthi.* In your investigation into the Source of *aham-vritti*, you take the essential *Chit*-aspect of the ego: and for this reason the enquiry must lead to the realization of the pure Consciousness of the Self."[9]

The *aham-vritti* mentioned here (the 'I'-thought), Sri Ramana also called *aham-idam*; this is the combination of 'I' (*aham*) with an

[9] *Maharshi's Gospel;* 6th edition, 1957; p. 82.

object, something thought of, a 'this' (*idam*).[10] So *Aham-idam* consists of pure Consciousness, or pure 'I', and everything of which Consciousness is *conscious of*, that is to say, of everything that is an object of 'I'. Most of the time this object (*idam*) is superseded by another one each millisecond. So in the 'I'-thought a continuous gyration of 'this's is occurring, whereby the 'I' is identifying itself with a number of 'this's ('I am this', *aham-idam*), as well as separating itself from them ('I and this', also *aham-idam*). In the combination *aham-idam,* the *idam* always refers to a multiple, a continuous alternation. However *aham* always remains the same. It is always singular. And this is an important point.

In fact that which we call an 'object' (whether it is a material object, sensory perceptible, or a psychic object, a thought) is always a *simultaneous existence* of subject and object, *aham* and *idam* ('I' and 'this'). *I* am experiencing now that this particular object is present; now *I* experience that there is a new object; and now *I* experience that there is another object, etcetera. It is always *aham-idam*. There is always this mixture, this blend (which in fact is identical to the knot of *Chit* and *jada* which we mentioned earlier). And within this, *aham* always remains the same.

In other words, all the time in which we imagine there are only objects in our attention, there is 'I' simultaneously, as subject. Please note, not as 'the I', because this personal form is in fact an *object*, which is only temporarily existent, but we refer the subject ('I') without which no object is possible. Then, quite simply *nothing* happens.

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[10] See for Sri Ramana's use of *aham-idam*: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Talk 177, 277, 314, 323, 363, 569, 577, 589 and 626. We recommend those interested to read about the theme of *aham* and *idam* in the Advaita-tradition in Michael Comans, *The Method of Early Advaita Vedanta.* Delhi: M. Banarsidass, 2000; p. 425-436. These pages in this excellent book deal with the approach of Padmapada, a direct disciple of Shankara. Padmapada was possibly the first one who used this terminology (*an-idam*, 'not-this', in place of *aham*). *Aham-idam* as a term also shows up in the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism; there it refers to the merging of the Absolute (*Aham*) with the manifesting (*idam*).

Sri Ramana's advice reads: remain with the always-present subject. And even though you are repeatedly attracted to objects, that does not matter. As soon as you become aware that you are enticed, you immediately recognize the subject (the light giving aspect) inevitably present within the luring object. It is always there. It is never absent.

The advice is to stay with *aham*, 'I', and it becomes more and more pure and less and less distracted by beliefs such as 'I am this', 'I am doing well', 'I am worthless', etcetera. By following these instructions you recognize the presence of pure 'I', always subject, self-luminous, giving light from itself to whatever is an object. From itself? Yes, from itSelf, because the more you ask after the source of 'I', the more you can see that the 'I' in fact is mere 'I', totally objectless, radiating, continuous 'I,I,I,I,I,I,I'.

Now already 'I' is present and permanently radiant. Yes, it is still 'entangled' with all kinds of 'this's, but that does not alter its radiance and luminosity. Only the 'this's are recognized as such, and once released they are dissolved in pure 'I'. The effect of the question 'who am I?' is that all 'this's drop off and just emptiness remains, an absence of all objects. This is 'I' in the pure sense of the word. By abiding here you have merged with what Ramana called *Aham sphurana*, the very first 'I'-vibration, the source of all manifestation.

Ramana repeatedly used the expression *Aham sphurana* as an indication for 'I,I' (*Aham Aham*)[11], for the most primary emanation of 'I'. *Sphurana* is something like the very first radiation, the still totally pure vibration of the origin. *Aham sphurana* is continuously present, always new and fresh, and hence this is exactly what 'I' am

[11] Concerning the term 'I,I' (*Aham Aham*), I consider this term as more fitting than the better known term 'the Self', because 'I,I' expresses constantly the linguistic first person, while 'the Self' is third person. Possibly Ramana has taken the term 'I,I' from the *Viveka-chudamani*; the term can be found there in the verses 137 and 219. In his translation Bhagavan did add the term 'I,I' in several verses (127, 213, 214, 381, 409 and 536). From my experience the best English translation of the *Viveka-chudamani* is the one by Anthony J. Alston, *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*. London: Shanti Sadan, 1997; p. 86 and 135.

always. In reality 'I' has never devoured or entangled by anything whatsoever.

This emphasis is crucial. Otherwise there will rise a misunderstanding that there is an 'I' that is actually bad, and must be destroyed, and after which, there is a kind of no man's land from which a new, clean 'I' will arise. As a matter of fact there are no two I's; no 'I' needs to be replaced by any clean or pure 'I'.[12] 'I' is always the same, always self-luminous and constantly present. Ramana's term 'annihilate' (*nasha*) refers to the 'I'-thought (*aham-vritti*), the entanglement of 'I' with an object (*aham-idam*), the inclination of the 'I' to present itself as an object.

As a matter of fact there are no two I's; no 'I' needs to be replaced by any clean or pure 'I'

This has already been noted in the quotation from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 286 (see footnote 6). Whilst describing the termination of the entanglement, Ramana uses the terminology "the 'I' remains pure," which means it "*remains 'I' in its pure, primordial state.*" He does not say: "a new 'I' comes into existence." Something has always been there, and *that* remains in its pure form: 'I-I'. In another place he says: "The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. Such is the paradox of Self-realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it."[13] And further: "Only the annihilation of 'I' [the 'I-thought'] is Liberation. But it can be gained only by keeping the 'I'-'I' always in view. ... There is only one 'I' all along; but what rises up from time to time is the mistaken '*I-thought*'; whereas the intuitive 'I' always remains Self-shining, i.e., even before it becomes manifest."[14]

When we accept the advice to confine our attention entirely to the pure subject, the aspect which is pure consciousness that excludes

[12] See the excellent article "'I' and 'I-I': a Reader's Query" by David Godman in *The Mountain Path*; Vol. 28, no. 1&2, June 1991; pp. 79-88.
[13] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 28.
[14] *ibid.*, Talk 139.

all objects, the question then arises: isn't this emphasis on 'pure I' a bit strange for an approach calling itself non-dualistic? Since the original starting point of two realities (Consciousness and inert matter) already sounds dualistic, and the advice to confine your attention totally to one of these two realities, pure Consciousness or pure 'I' (or 'I, I', Subject), is in fact excluding something, and indeed one could legitimately call it dualistic. Haven't we arrived here at the pitfall of Advaita, which seems to encourage us to separate ourselves from daily life as a thinking, feeling and acting being? How can such a dualistic approach ever lead to non-duality?

In reply Sri Ramana would say that *as long as you experience the objective as separate from the subject* you are looking from a dualistic point of view at yourself, and so you have to stress the aspect of *consciousness* only. "He must first discern consciousness (*chit*) from insentience (*jada*) and be the consciousness only. Later let him realise that insentience is not apart from consciousness."[15] And: "Know the subject first and then question about the object. The subject *comprehends* the object also. That one aspect is an all-comprehensive aspect. See yourself first and then see the objects."[16]

" 'I', 'this' appear together now. But 'this' (*idam*) is contained in the 'I' (*aham*) – they are not apart. 'This' has to merge into and become one with 'I'. The 'I' that remains over is the true 'I'."[17]

This constantly present, true 'I' is 'I,I', that which remains when the combination 'I-am-this' or 'I, this' is purified from all 'this's by means of the question 'Who am I?' The remaining 'I,I' can only become manifest (*sphurana*) when the veil of all 'this's has fallen off. This *sphurana*, this primary form of manifestation is not manifestation in the usual sense of the word. It is not something of which there is a multiple. You cannot turn it into an object. You can only *merge* with it, through recognition — I,I,I, continuous, unbroken, without form, without contents, without sound or colour. That is all you have to

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[15] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Talk 192.

[16] *ibid.*, Talk 199; see also 310.

[17] *ibid.*, Talk 626.

do; abide in this place, rest and relax in it. Everything possibly beyond that[18], the 'Absolute', 'Enlightenment' or whatever term, is Grace. Abide in this place, 'I, I'. It is here your search is over.

So in answer to the question 'why do Advaita teachers use the term 'I' as an indication for something real?' it can be said it is because 'I' is so close, it is the nearest thing there is. Everyone recognises it as 'oneself'. It is all about self-realisation and each of us has to see for our self that 'I' is the presence that is constantly here, and is the entrance to Reality. The entrance is never elsewhere. You need not look for it. You need not go elsewhere in order to experience 'I'. Wherever you go, you are already there. 'I' is already there. 'I' is a door, and it is always open.

(English translation: Johan Veldman) ▲

[18] 'Beyond' implies that the attitude of the *seeker* can be continued. Being carried by *Aham sphurana* actually means that even the power of discrimination, so far our most efficient tool may be left behind. That power has served us well with the seeing of the difference between 'I' (*aham*) and 'this' (*idam)*, but its role is over. Only surrender to the permanent Reality is called for here.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's Commentary

verse one

S. Ram Mohan

ULLADU NARPADU *(The Forty verses on Existence) is the most comprehensive exposition of Sri Bhagavan's teachings. It is a concise and precise statement of Advaita Vedanta in Tamil. It is an authentic exposition of the non-dual experience. In fact, apart from the second invocatory verse there is no reference to a personal God or Iswara in the entire forty verses. Reality is identified as Existence-Awareness-Bliss, which is known by '*being it'. *It is universal, and can be experienced by all irrespective of caste or creed. The teaching delineated here is no 'ism'. It is the presentation of the 'Absolute'. Bhagavan teaches in this work that all distinctions, the foremost being the distinction of such as 'I' and 'You' are mere appearances. The Self alone is. The non-duality of the Absolute, the non-reality of the apparent world and the non-difference of the* Jiva

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from the Absolute self – this core idea of existence is beautifully carried through as a powerful and lucidly flowing stream of teaching in sculptured Tamil Venba Metre.

Ulladu Narpadu *is the exposition of Supreme Truth and a simple and direct path for realizing it. Bhagavan does not encourage any dialectical exposition of Reality for mere theoretical understanding. He teaches every one to attain* Atmasakshatkara *(Self-Realisation).*

As he says, "The seeing self is the Eye and the Eye is the Eye of Infinity". Infinite consciousness illumines all the objects without any distinction. He advises us to desist from taking the subject as separate from the world. Such separateness in seeing is responsible for the seeing plurality of objects. The subject who perceives the world is also part of the world just like the dream-perceiver who is a part of the dream that the waking individual has created. The Self is the substratum in which the dreaming, sleeping and waking state are created, projected and experienced by a person who is also part of the projection. The substratum is the 'Self'. The world and all the creation exists as an idea only in the mind. It is like a picture projected on the screen by the projector.

Accordingly to Bhagavan, the Absolute Reality is of the nature of Total Awareness; knowledge and ignorance are for the ego, not for the Self. He advises us to delve deep in our Heart to find out from where the ego arises; controlling speech and breath like a diver who dives into the well to recover a precious thing that had been lost into it. When one reaches this state, the subject object perception vanishes. When one enquires 'Who am I?' within the mind, the individual 'I' falls crest fallen. As the enquiry reaches the Heart immediately Reality manifests itself spontaneously as 'I' – 'I' the absolute.

In the final verse, Bhagavan puts a cap on all theoretical and futile discussions on the relative merits of various types of realizations, saying that those arguments are perpetuated by ego in order to prolong its existence. He epitomizes that the True Liberation is the destruction of ego which is responsible for these diversifying ideas. Follow this and you will know the Ulladu[1] *the Self that alone exists.*

[1] In Tamil it means 'that which is'.

The very first verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* declares that the Ultimate Truth which we seek to realize is the only reality. We call it the Self, *Atman* or *Brahman*. It is the substratum *(adhishtanam)* of all existence. The diverse universe requires as its base and origin an omniscient, omnipotent cause, which is *Brahman*. If *Brahman* is self-established and self-complete, and is the cause of manifestation, it must be the sole cause. In the *Mundaka Upanishad* the example is given of the spider which unfolds a universe from its own body.[2] It is a multi-powered principle, which apparently through desire, will, and knowledge creates, sustains and destroys the world of plurality.

The trinity, which operates in the phenomenal world – namely the individual soul, the personal God and the world we see and experience, are all indeed mere superimposition *(avaranam)* on the Self. Due to ignorance, the world appears as real and consequently blurs the real Self so that now it is not seen. In our enquiry into the fabric of the trinity, the truth is that Self alone is real and that the furtive trinity established in the mind fears any enquiry into its false nature or reality.

Verse One

"Since the world is seen by us, it is imperative that there is a primordial cause for it, which possess the power to manifest itself in myriad forms. The sequential pictures of name and form, their seer, the light which makes the picture to be seen and the basic screen on which the picture is presented – all together are only one entity, the Self."

A doubt may arise as to whether the reality, which has been transformed into the manifold world, remains unchanged while serving as the substratum for the world-appearance. Here the verse clarifies that the Reality has not undergone anything like an actual change or metamorphosis when it appears as the phenomenal world of the triad. It is only due to ignorance that this phantom is created. The meaning is that the *Brahman* serves as an unchanging substratum for the superimposition of world-appearance on it; so that the latter borrows the reality-nature, the *sat* aspect, of the substratum and

[2] *Mundaka Upanishad,* 1.1.7.

appears as real. Bhagavan illustrates this by the analogy of cinema with one difference. In the cinema show the spectator is not inextricably identified with or confused by the pictures on the screen. He remains apart from it all the time. But in the world-appearance, the spectator, the *jiva*, is always involved. He is an inseparable part of the presentation. The result is that when the inquiry reveals that the world is unreal, the individual soul who participates also is part of that unreality.

In this analogy, the pictures which appear on the screen are all transient and are therefore without reality. When light of the projector falls on the screen, the sequence of the pictures is seen on it and but for a moment, appear as stable and therefore (relatively) real. Likewise, just as the appearance of the seer and the spectacle in the show are unreal, so also are the soul and the external world we experience. Only the substratum, Existence-Consciousness (*sat-chit*) is real. Reality (*sat*) serves as the necessary basis for the world theatre. Consciousness (*chit*) is the light by which the world is illuminated and becomes visible. The world as such has neither existence nor consciousness. It is not self-luminous.[3] Later in verse 13 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan explains: "The Self, which is the pure consciousness, alone is real."

But in the world-appearance, the spectator, the *jiva*, is always involved. He is an inseparable part of the presentation

There could be an objection. The *Upanishads* declare that the *Brahman* created the world and it itself became the world. Would the sages so declare if these statements were untrue? It should be clarified that the core of the Upanishadic message is to be understood thus: The world, by itself, has neither existence nor consciousness.

[3] The Self is defined by the *Taittiriya Upanishad* as the light by which everything is lighted up.

The Light is independent of any form, and it is its own reality because it is not dependent upon any thing for its existence. Consciousness is the nature of the *Brahman*. It is on the basis of this fundamental principle, that the appearance of name and form (*nama-rupa*) mysteriously takes the opportunity to manifest and is seemingly real because it borrows from the luminosity of *Brahman*. Form (*rupa*) stands for all physical phenomena, and name (*nama*) for all mental phenomena, and other than these there is nothing in the world.

It is wrong to suppose that Brahman has actually become the world

In other words, the trinity has no real existence. They have only a apparent existence and their light is derived from the substratum. From this it follows that the names and forms are superimpositions and are therefore unreal. Bhagavan further emphasizes in verse 4 of *Ulladu Narpadu*[4] that names and forms seem to be real only in the state of ignorance, not in the state of Realization, the state in which the sage exists. The same truth is expressed in verse 4 of *Arunachala Ashtakam*.[5] The identity of the *Brahman* as the Self is clearly expressed in the last sentence of the verse: "He – the Real Self – is everything".

The verse clearly indicates that it is wrong to suppose that Brahman has actually become the world. It should not be compared with the analogy of milk which becomes curd, and by this change loses its original form or nature. By definition, *Brahman* is the changeless one. It has never actually been shaped in the form of this world. The world is a mere appearance, a phantom created by ignorance.

A further example to substantiate the argument is the famous analogy of the serpent and the rope. What appears as a snake is only

[4] "If Self has form, the world and God will also appear to have form. But if Self is formless, by whom and how can form (of world and God) be seen? The Self, the Real Eye, is infinite."

[5] "Oh Arunachala the great, Thou peerless gem, abide and shine Thou as my Self, one without a second."

a rope. In the poor light of the evening, due to misinterpretation by the sense-organs and the mind, the rope is mistaken to be a snake. In a clear light the snake is understood to be only a rope. The delusion is gone. In the same way, in the state of ignorance of one's Real Self, the reality (*sat*) appears as the world, one of the triad of illusions as mentioned earlier. Just as the rope which seen in clear light of day, is seen only as a rope and ceases to appear as a snake, so in the state of right awareness (*samyak prajna*) the world-appearance vanishes and its substratum the *Brahman* is experienced as it really is, perfect existence-consciousness-bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). In the same way, with respect to the analogy of the rope and the snake, even when it is being seen as a snake, the rope alone exists.

So also with this, the state of ignorance we experience in general. When the world is being seen, the Self alone exists, not the world. Once this is realized, the world is seen for what it is: it is never real. ▲

BHAGAVAN'S HERBAL REMEDIES

VAISWANARA CHURNAM

English	Tamil
Rock Salt — 1 part	*Induppu*
Wild celery/smallage — 2 parts	*Omum*
Cummin seed — 3 parts	*Seeragam*
Long Pepper — 4 parts	*Kanda Tippili*
Dry Ginger — 5 parts	*Shukku*
Outer shell of Myrobalan fruit — 6 parts	*Kadukkai Koodu*

Convert these above into fine powder, and mix them well. When necessary take between 1 to 3 grams of this powder, mix it with either water or buttermilk and consume. Take thrice daily. This prescription cures stomach problems like a dull stomach-ache and burning sensation in the stomach.

At Ramanasramam

Reflections from the Longhouse

excerpt from a work in progress:
Chasing The Rainbow: A Western Sadhu in India

S. Govind

IN the summer of 1967 I came overland to India. I was in search of wisdom, and, without really knowing it, a new identity. October brought me south to the benign influence of the sage Ramana 'Bhagavan' and to the ashram founded in his name.

The sage's renown was hardly mirrored by my reception at the Tiruvannamalai bus-stand where the first things encountered as I stepped down from the Madras coach were sweetmeat hawkers swishing fans at the squadrons of not-so-divine flies and raucous discordant music from the shops. But making my way past shanties and whitewashed houses to the Ramana Ashram road, the peacefulness of the South soon embraced me; the tranquility in the atmosphere outside town summoned up what I was here for: to meditate in an Indian ashram dedicated to a genuine sage. The bleak flat fields seared off to the horizon tilled and edged with scrubby thorn trees awaiting the winter monsoon rain. Towards me a horsecart, a *tonga,* approached

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lazily, its single passenger and driver seated on tufts of hay extruding front and back, its arched covering painted like the colourful temple towers of southern Hinduism; in the distance I saw an oxcart rumbling along with its big wooden wheels and the painted long horns of the humpbacked draught animals; I too began to feel open and free and took my time in ambling the lonely four kilometre stretch to Ramana Bhagavan's ashram.

With eyes cast down like a pilgrim rather than gazing about like a tourist I wanted instinctively to feel more like a local and soak in the much needed tranquility; though at the time I failed to consciously recognise what I would learn later was the cynosure of the area. It was a source of the silence: the pastoral earthy manifestation of Shiva, the mountain called Arunachala rising pyramid-like from the plain; the mountain at whose base Ramana had sought sacred refuge. Now, I wonder how to justify such oblivion on my part? Was it that the sacred peak so dominated these surroundings, was so there that I could not see it? Was I so concentrated on preparing myself with all due humility for my first ashram 'experience'? Or was its presence like that of Ramana, making itself felt in a deeper unconscious way? Perhaps I was already embraced by the silence of the mountain which was a backdrop to my own burning aspirations.

I cannot separate my Indian pilgrimage from a constant dream of reaching a higher self, for each step I took in those young days I wished to mark as a stage in refinement of soul. Over the following weeks I learned to see 'soul' in the ever-present Arunachala which had drawn Ramana as to a God, and to appreciate the South for preserving the ancient ways. Is it ridiculous to say that a mountain embodies silence? But it was this that Bhagavan brought out in those who sought his instruction.

Further along, in contrast to the open fields and scrub, on the dusty stretch of road I came upon a covering of shade and I gazed up at a spreading gulmohur just as a morning breeze lifted the feathery branches. A shiver passed through me as it did the leaves for here suddenly I faced the entrance to the ashram. I stood savouring the

shade as I doublechecked the name 'Sri Ramanasramam' emblazoned in wrought-iron lettering on the archway.

Through the gateway stood a huge old tree, the iluppai, and coconut palms swayed within while monkeys skittered about to the sounds of muffled shouts at their risible mischiefmaking. From the surrounding ashram buildings a scent of sweet incense wafted in the air; breathing deep of it upon my first steps into the compound I was captivated by a sense of déjà vu, of having been here before as I sank into the sense of warm familiarity that overwhelmed me. I saw a pastoral scene which seemed to beckon one to rest for awhile no, for an eternity in meditation.

Then, as if breaking the spell a friend appeared Edward whom I'd met some days earlier in Madras, calling out, "Hallo!" I smiled and waved back in a kind of trance as he walked over to me; but I also became aware of someone else standing behind me at the gateway. I glanced back and then turned, startled by another real South Indian phenomenon: a wild faced gentleman with dreadlocks piled high; he was a vividly decorated *sadhu* with a matted solar crown of hair, a pink vertical stripe adorning the centre of his forehead, and many courses of *rudraksha* beads resting around his neck. With his gaze penetrating mine he powerfully impressed upon me one more image of a vibrant and ancient heritage, a tribal shaman with a bright terrifying badge of otherworldliness.

My first concern, Edward told me, drawing me away from the vision and bringing me back to mundane reality, was to come over to the office and register. Being a wanderer I had been brought here by 'random destiny' and had not thought to book a reservation. Having seen Bhagavan's bright and simple portrait before me on two separate occasions back in the West, and struck by his piercing eyes so different from those of 'the shaman' waiting for food at the gate.

I had met Edward by chance at a bookstore in Madras and he had opened a book at Bhagavan's gripping portrait: and zap! third time lucky, it seems. From whence were those remarkable eyes of enlightenment so fleeting had been their darshan? Their power was universal. Once their gaze caught one's attention a deep

impression remained. It might follow one all one's life, buried in the unconscious. Like the mountain's there was a simplicity in Bhagavan's gaze. Like the bare mountain he wore no colours, he wore practically nothing at all! His revelation is in silence, transparency, compassion, desireless wisdom.

After assessing my seriousness the ashram registrar granted me leave to stay in the 'men's house' for a couple of weeks. I was shown to the same low-walled palm-thatched house I'd already seen inviting me from the gate. Edward also encamped on the earthen floor till his assigned cottage was to become available. Inside this men's room no furniture of any kind interrupted the rough clay floor, a framed palm opening was the window to provide air, and the golden gaps in the woven walls meant it was cool and well-ventilated. On that first morning Edward and I lingered where we would also be sleeping Indian style on the uneven hard clay, and for the few moments before lunch would call us away, we renewed our acquaintance. He soon pointed out that the floor we stood on was covered in a papery layer of dry cow dung . . . and he looked for my reaction. This was fine by me. The earthier the better and I felt honoured and empowered to be in what I dubbed 'the longhouse'. It was more than expected since in my romantic imagination I was geared up to imitate Bhagavan and the *sadhus* and to sleep under the stars. I loved the idea of sleeping on the earth! "Like a villager," Edward said. "Yeah!" I replied. He further explained that the thin coating of cow dung which bonded the earth was quite hygienic, 'scientific' in fact, like many aspects of the rustic life of India he too admired.

From his pocket Edward pulled out Bhagavan's "Who Am I?" saying he felt this to be one of the best tools for meditation. Glancing through the pages I admired the immediacy of Bhagavan's teaching and how he went to the crux of the matter.

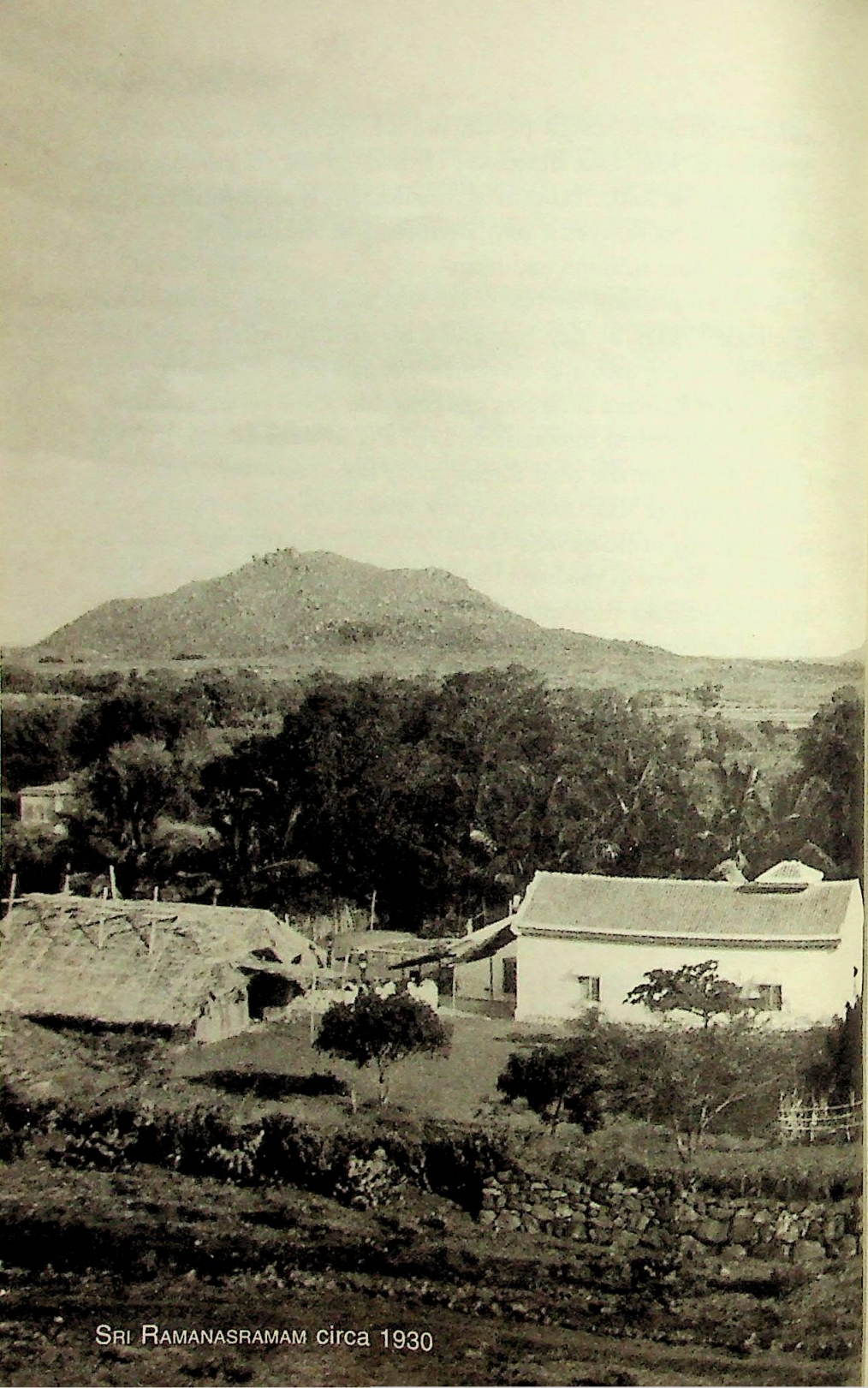
It was when we walked outside to go for lunch I first really became consciously aware of the mountain, Arunachala, rising up like a wall from the ashram precincts. I asked Edward: had he climbed it yet? He winced. No, he had not. And he explained rather solemnly as we walked over for lunch that one had to be a special person for that;

and he meant by 'special person' not a professional climber but an 'unpolluted' soul. Like Bhagavan? He nodded silently and then deep in thought he said, "Most of all, Arunachala is a sacred mountain, the body of Shiva, even if only attempting it, one has to be . . . well, prepared, pure in mind and heart . . ."

Well, I was doing my best to be pure, and trying to discover what this meant. Day by day I regarded the at first invisible mountain with increasing awe and reverence too. It became an ever present symbol for Ramana Bhagavan's eternity and Shiva, his *ishta devata.*

One day melted into another. I felt secure in the ashram routine, meals seated on the tiled dining room floor taken on a wide and shining banana leaf, and the group meditation experienced in the stone canopy of Bhagavan's Mother's shrine. The problem was that once I sat down to meditate I wanted to stay like that forever! Here at the ashram the time spread out endlessly. Even if my stay was to be limited to two weeks, each day held out to me a sampling of a new kind of timeless depth. It was only up to me to say: Okay, I've had enough, and to stretch and get up and walk out. No external interference, and this alone was to me an ample form of bliss. Sometimes I would skip a meal or a tea just to be silent and alone. I lost my sense of hunger. Concentrating on Bhagavan's *upadesa* of 'Who Am I?' and going over aspects of his biography I reflected on his ability as a homeless young man to sit absorbed totally detached, it seems in the insect-ridden recess, the *patala lingam*, at the Shiva temple in town.

Edward soon departed for his own cottage and I saw him less often. Prizing the solitude in the old fashioned longhouse, I would often open my eyes and just contemplate my surroundings. The dung-covered mud floors, I felt, must have assimilated the human vibes of decades, back to the days when Bhagavan was in the body. Moreover the traditional patterns of the thatched walls and roof ceiling, too, echoed for me some weaving of the inner energies of being. I admired its rustic elegance: this was a comforting look, the thatch's layers and scales, its pattern of latticed light soothing to the mind which wants to travel inward and backwards to a childlike innocent land, so that it



Sri Ramanasramam circa 1930

can travel forwards one supposes, to the selfless self we all secretly aspire to. At night I slept so very peacefully there on the earthen floor, the most peaceful sleep I had thus far in India, distantly aware of the night sounds beyond the compound; owls, insects and a barking dog and I always awakened fully rested to the early *puja* bells, looking forward to bucket baths, chilly and refreshing.

Towards the midpoint of my stay though, a group of Tamil men arrived one dusk; they came in a great bustle after first peeking in at me all alone there in the room. The day was darkening as they appeared at the doorway of the longhouse. At first my heart sank: Oh! I thought, they're going to break up my seclusion, my luxury. And yes, indeed, they were going to share the longhouse with me, its lone occupant. Pilgrims from a faraway village, they had come to visit the temples in town and would also pray to Bhagavan; they wore holy ash streaked across their foreheads and a vermilion spot, the *bindi*, between their eyes.

I was intrigued despite my selfish solitude, for they were, like Bhagavan whose presence pervaded the ashram, a rare piece of India and so different from the other urbane and sophisticated residents and visitors to the ashram.

After depositing their bags and going out to bathe, they dressed in fresh white dhotis and left for the temples to attend the late *pujas*, principally the Shiva temple of Arunachalaeswara. Returning in the pitch dark carrying delicate jasmine flowers with offerings of bananas and coconuts from the gods, their presence once again broke in on my solitude but they were mellow now, tired, and they lit lamps, spread out their mats and soon snored their way to sleep. Unlike the stares I was used to (as a young white man in India) for the most part they politely disregarded me in what I learned to be a surprisingly cosmopolitan and yet village style of live-and-let-live humanity and hospitality.

But I was not to be left alone. One rather more outgoing and insouciant member of the group squatted next to me as the others drifted off to sleep and kept me awake talking. And that night revealed to me that there was a great big world of spirituality out there in the southern countryside.

In halting English the village man asked my origins. One had heard the questions countless times on the roadsides, usually from wide eyed school kids practising their English idioms. "What is your native place?" "What does your father?" On this occasion I took a deep breath and replied to the stock questions with what I considered utmost patience and humility. But it was only after this introduction that our midnight conversation begun in earnest. And it was, I was not yet used to this, a talk punctuated by large silences. Village silences. And echoic of Bhagavan and his mountain. For we sat silently for the longest time in a silence which was more than the mere absence of words. The moment seemed to have completed itself, he smiled, and went off to his section of the floor.

Oddly enough, through all my journeying no-one had ever asked me, "Why?" Why was I here? Maybe because the word in English 'Why?' was not used very much. But then, why not? For though asking all about one's forebears, and even one's income, is apparently all right it was considered, so I believe, impolite to investigate one's motives with expressions such as, "What is your purpose?" Our schooling is such that we take the use of an enquiring mind visavis one another for granted. And being brought up in a western social universe I felt required to relate my motivations and I had related to him as best I could in the words I had picked up from reading, like spiritual *sadhana*, and sitting up folding my legs made a gesture of meditation, *dhyana*. This pleased him, if only to see this Westerner explaining the self evident, what is in India a rare though well-recognised pursuit.

Ah, *bhakti*! he exclaimed. I knew what this word meant: devotion. And though I basked in the concept a bit, I hadn't considered myself the devotional type. At least not in any conventional sense. I was devoted to attaining wisdom and enlightenment, sure. I had attended the formal *pujas* at the shrines, the waving of lights and the ringing of bells in a kind of mystified acceptance, while feeling still somewhat uneasy and out of place. For someone of my background this was from another planet. And though I secretly hungered for it, religious devotion remained unnatural, artificial.

The more I immersed myself into the culture the more I was to learn that the search for wisdom is largely considered, at least by ordinary folk, to be the highest form of *bhakti*, or religious reverence. And without this popular belief, I wonder if the pursuit of wisdom by individuals in India would have much of a chance! Quite apart from this practical social glue, I learned that without intense devotion and faith in the unseen, and the unknown in brief, in God, one's efforts would revert to selfish egoism. This knowledge was initiated in me by Bhagavan and the experiences in the ashram. Years later I remember one country person telling me another reason why *sadhus* meditated: for the good of the people! Thus enlightenment has a practical social aspect by creating community good will.

My midnight interlocutor was not much older than me but I realised how different was our outlook. Totally different. Apart from the culture of *bhakti*, he was a true man of the old countryside, a country farmer Hindu which he indicated with a gesture of ploughing fields. His party had completed their farm work and they were touring temples and holy places to pray for good rains and healthy children. For my part, a product of western modernism, materialism, skepticism, I felt locked inside of my body, inside of my individuality, and doubted that anything that occurred inside would have much effect beyond my own perimeter. But it was here at the ashram that east and west, ancient and modern, met in me and I realized that the search for perennial wisdom was not only one of the few genuine adventures left in the world, but a boon to the world at large.

"Ramana . . . Bhagavan?" I had asked in my word-at-a-time conversation. I felt he did have an inkling of what Bhagavan's universal *upadesa* was about as he took a deep breath, rolled his eyes to heaven in mimicry of a mystic *samadhi*, maintained it for half a minute or so and then looked straight at me again and smiled the broadest smile. It seemed that *bhakti* and community and rain magic also encompassed the search for self knowledge. And yet, and yet, I think . . . still how far apart he and I were!

Slowly, from that time on, I began to learn how conditioned I was by my 'social universe', and, by the same token, felt a

sparkling desire to be as 'innocent' or as 'direct' as he and his neighbours seemed in their faith! Then there was Tamil. To speak this language! Yes! This seemed to me another important key. To understand this country mind! To start where he my new Tamil friend is and proceed as, say, Bhagavan had done: with faith, to strip one's self virtually naked of what? Of analytical conditioning? Of one's entrapment in the mundane self, as if such a thing were at all possible . . . and yet to be one's self, to see one's self, for one's self and others, in a new identity.

In the following years I spent in Tamil Nadu, I understood that the search for wisdom is an effort requiring great faith. And that faith requires community since it morally and materially supports the individual's enlightenment, whatever its level of attainment or outward rationale. I saw beginning at that midnight conversation that this wisdom comes from their philosophy, their temples, sacred mountains, and festive rituals as well as their contemplation as demonstrated by Bhagavan which goes hand-in-hand with the foundation of the *sanatana dharma*, India's name for the *philosophia perrenis*. This is why it was natural for the transcendent Bhagavan to accept, rather than to reject (as some unreasonable rationalists do) the rituals, the shrines, the everyday religious culture which he was born into: above all Bhagavan seemed well aware of the procedure of transcend and include!

Early next morning, after first *pujas* in town, the young farmer came into the longhouse with an offering, a clump of dates, pieces of fresh coconut, banana and a cluster of flowers brought back from the temples and shrines. I was touched by this. Was the quality of *bhakti* affecting him. I was aware of the coarseness of my erstwhile selfish solitude, and was now sorry they were departing so soon.

Of what else had our conversation consisted? The young farmer was proud of his eighth grade education. And though our talk was limited, there was a common idiom in words like *dhyana*, with nods and smiles plus the Hindi "aachaa" and "nahi" acquired in the north which carried us through.

"Tamil?"

"Nahi, Tamil not knowing."

It was evident, though, that like me he was a communicator. I suggested he continue his education and for him to use his skills. His broad smile had been so pleasing. Next morning he expressed wonder to the others at me, golden haired foreigner on my mat meditating instead of behind a desk ordering people about and signing important documents. As if I ever would!

"Marriage?"

"Nahi!"

He happlily gestured that he too aspired to be a *sadhu* like Bhagavan, to seek Lord Shiva's *darsana*, but shaking an admonitory finger at himself that this was not to be as his family required 'marriage' for him one day. Ancient duty. I thought: 'What would Bhagavan's advice be?' and I piously suggested to the man that Bhagavan would say he pursue a spiritual life at home in everything he did.

In that brief morning his co-pilgrims asked about my "native" all over again; "Born in England, raised in America," I said. Another very intelligent looking elder man, silent until then, said "London?" That's right, "London . . . and New York." Thus, others broke the ice and I repeated "America" in syllables conforming to their strong pronunciation: "Amerryka" . . . and this made the elder man laugh, and we all laughed too. God! It felt so homely!

Encouraged by this encounter at the Ashram to go forth into the countryside, I learned, in the cool of Bhagavan's blessing, about where I belonged. As it happened I ventured deeper into their world for years of intense meditation and acquired in the process, confident village Tamil.

In those early days of acquaintance with the solitude in the ashram and the surroundings, I was touched by Arunachala, the sacred Mountain rising dramatically out of the plain. It stood as a foundation stone and a manifestation of my faith in the Indian countryside.

At the time this *imago* of Shiva and Bhagavan had been too overwhelming for me to comprehend but I had taken the first small step in the direction I knew to be true. ▲

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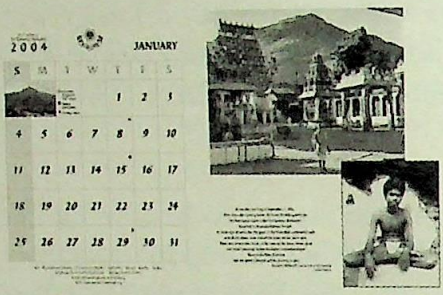

To commemorate the 125th Jayanti of Sri Bhagavan, the ashram has brought out a 12 sheet calendar with 12 popular photographs of Bhagavan and the places where he stayed at Arunachala.
Price: Rs. 50/-

Devotees also have the choice of a 4 sheet calendar which has 4 digitally coloured photographs of Sri Bhagavan.
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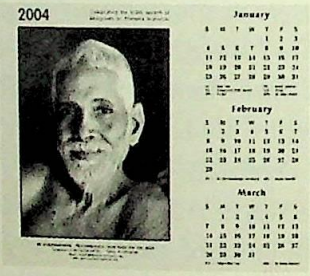

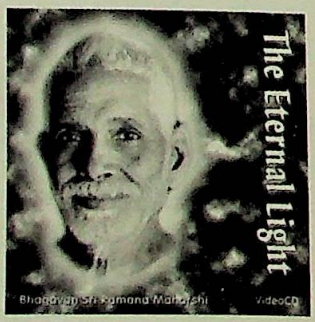

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Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam

verse three

SADHU OM

English Paraphrase

O Arunachala! Having scrutinized with that pure mind which is facing Selfwards (*ahamukham*) "Where does this 'I' rise?" and having [thereby] clearly known the form [the real nature] of 'I', one ceases to exist [by merging] in You like a river [which merges and loses its form] in the ocean. Know thus.

Commentary

In the first verse Sri Bhagavan said that by the all-pervading spreading of its bright light of Self-consciousness, Arunachala swallows the whole universe. From this it is clear how brilliant must be the self-shining clarity of consciousness which Sri Bhagavan experienced as 'I'. What then is the means by which we can attain this clarity of Self-consciousness? In this verse he answers this question.

Born in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu, Sadhu Om first came to Bhagavan in 1945. He was a close associate of Muruganar and settled permanently in Ramananagar. A naturally gifted poet he wrote many philosophical verses and songs on Bhagavan. His book *The Path of Sri Ramana* Part One is an authentic and original exposition of Bhagavan's teachings. He attained *samadhi* in 1985.

In the first line he reveals what instrument is required to seek that clarity of Self-consciousness: "With that pure mind (*amala mati*) which is facing Selfward (*ahamukham*)". That is, first the mind should be pure. Attaining the true clarity is not possible for a mind which is impure. What is an impure mind? It is a mind whose light is polluted and made dim by being soaked in the dirt of worldly desires and attachments. So the mind should first have become pure by the removal of all that dirt in the form of desires and attachments. That is, the mind should be freed of the fetters of all its strong likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions. Only such a mind can be a fit instrument for Self-enquiry, because only such a mind can give up its habit of always dwelling upon external objects and turn Selfwards.

The mind knowing its own form of light having given up external objects is true knowledge

It is not sufficient, however, merely to make the mind pure. Having attained purity, the mind should be turned Selfwards. Here the word '*ahamukham*' does not mean mere introversion or turning the mind away from external objects. Having given up attending to external objects, the mind should attend to Self, the light of consciousness, which shines in the heart as 'I'. Then only can the true clarity of Self-consciousness be attained.

"The mind knowing its own form of light, having given up external objects, alone is true knowledge."[1]

'*Aham*' means 'I', and hence '*ahamukham*' means facing 'I' or attending to Self. Only with this pure Selfward-facing mind can we scrutinize and know the source from which 'I' rises. Throughout the waking and dream states the rising 'I' is engaged in so many activities, but it never turns towards itself to find out from where it arose.

[1] *Upadesa Undiyar*, v.16.

Here 'from where' (*engu*) means 'from what' or 'from which source'. The source of this rising 'I' is not any place but is only the being 'I' which exists and shines in all the three states, waking, dream and deep sleep.

If with the pure Selfward-facing mind we scrutinize the source from which this 'I' rises, we will clearly know the form of 'I', says Sri Bhagavan in this verse. What is meant by clearly knowing the form of 'I'? It is experiencing that the real nature of 'I' is not the mind which rises, wanders about and again subsides, but is only the reality which always exists and shines as the mere being consciousness without any rising, wandering or subsiding. That is, the form of 'I' means the reality which is the true import of the word 'I'.

"That [the one reality which shines forth as 'I-I', the whole] is always the import of the word 'I', because we do not cease to exist even in sleep, which is devoid of 'I'."[2]

That is, since there is a consciousness 'I' which does not cease to exist even in sleep where there is no ego 'I', that ever-shining consciousness is the real import of the word 'I'. Therefore, experiencing the nature of that ever-shining 'I' is what Sri Bhagavan describes in this verse as clearly knowing the form of 'I'.

After thus knowing the form of 'I', what then happens to the ego 'I', which was all this time rising, engaging in activity and again subsiding? "Having clearly known the form of 'I', one ceases to exist [or one comes to rest] in You, O Arunachala, like a river in the ocean", says Sri Bhagavan in this verse. That is, just as a river attains quiescence and loses its separate existence when it merges in the ocean, so that rising 'I' or ego becomes motionless and ceases to exist as a separate entity when it merges in the being 'I', which is Arunachala.

In *Sri Ramana Sahasram* there is a prayer that the rising 'I' should merge and disappear in the being 'I', becoming that being 'I', which ever shines devoid of the rising 'I'.

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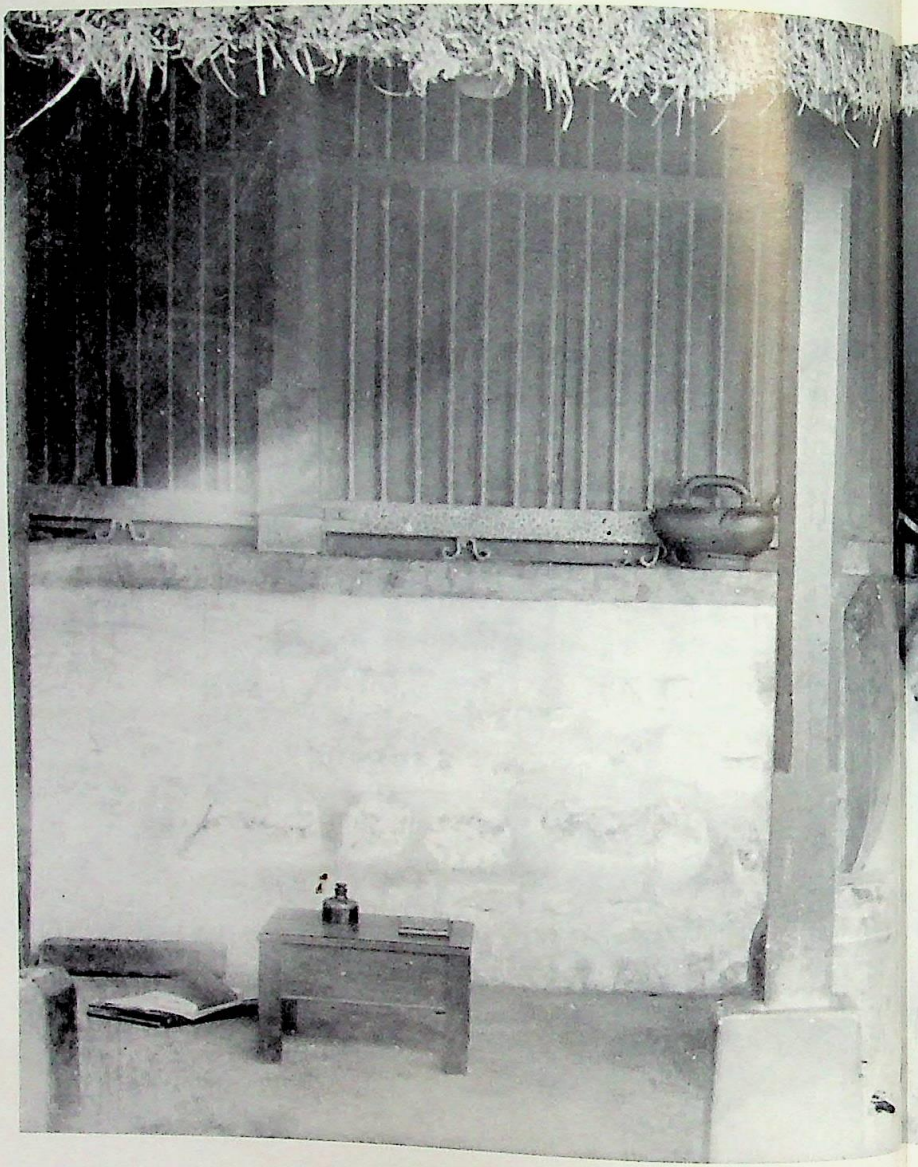
[2] *Upadesa Undiyar*, v.16.

"You [O Sri Ramana], who are the being 'I' which is ever devoid of the rising 'I', are the unlimited 'I' (*paripurna aham*). Bestow Grace upon the devotee who stands weeping, worshipping You, begging and praying whole-heartedly all the time that the rising 'I' should drown in that unlimited 'I'."[3]

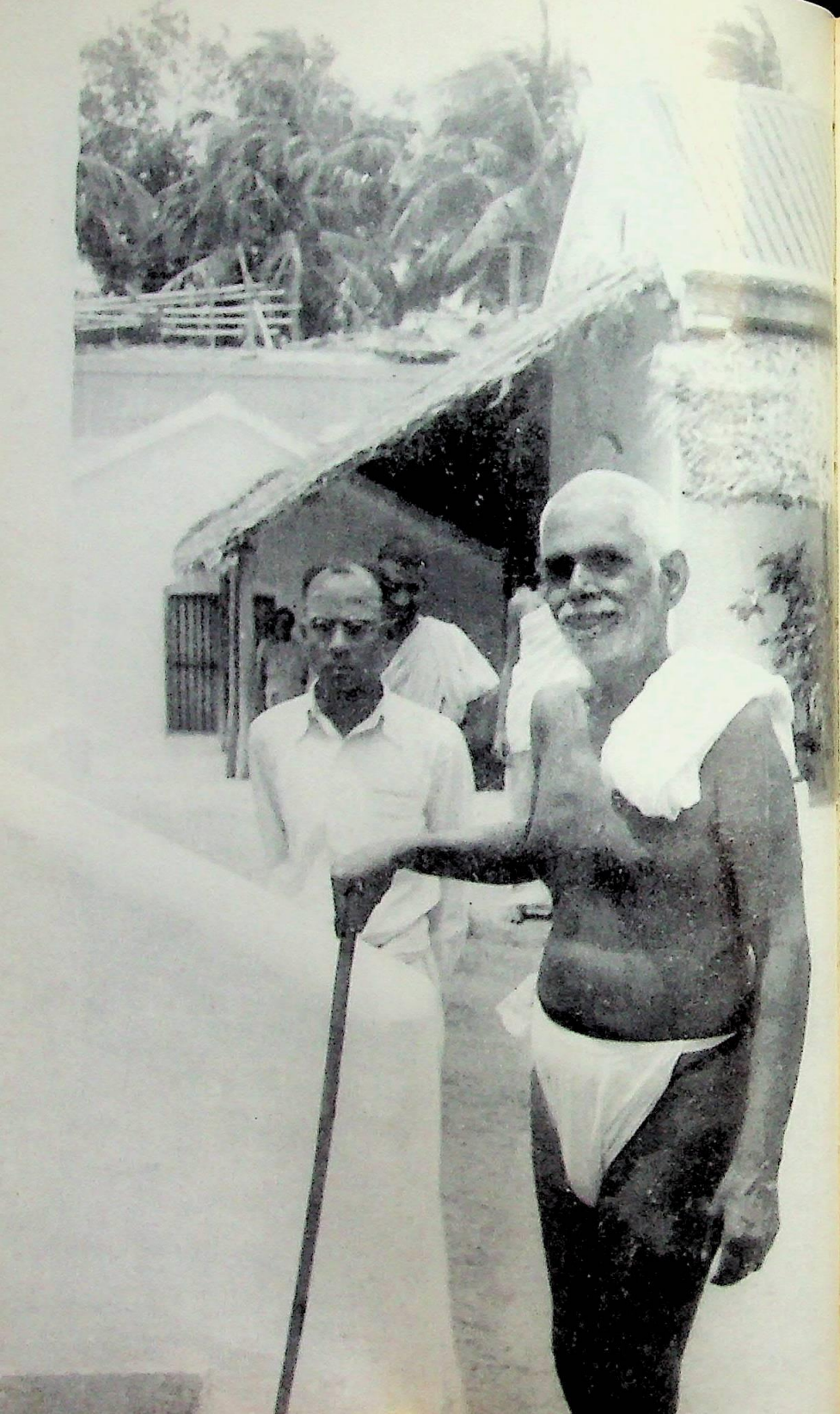
Here it is said that there is a rising 'I' and an unlimited 'I'. That unlimited 'I' alone is the true 'I'. That 'I' alone shines in sleep, which is devoid of the rising 'I'. Therefore that alone is the true import of the word 'I'. Knowing the form of that 'I' alone is what Sri Bhagavan refers to in this verse as "clearly knowing the form of 'I'". Just as the river ceases to flow and comes to a standstill when it merges in the ocean, so the rising 'I' ceases to rise and attains stillness when it merges in the unlimited being 'I'. And just as the river ceases to have any separate existence after reaching the ocean, so the rising ego 'I' loses its individuality when it merges in Self.

Thus in this verse Sri Bhagavan has explained clearly both the practice and the result of Self-enquiry. When with the pure mind, which alone can turn Selfwards, the real 'I' is clearly known, the false 'I' will disappear, merging in that real 'I' like a shadow disappearing in the light. What Sri Bhagavan then proceeds to describe in the next verse is also only this same path of Self-enquiry, but presented in a slightly diluted manner in order to suit the taste of the person for whom it was written. ▲

[3] *Sri Ramana Sahasram*, v. 177.



Sri Bhagavan at Skandasramam, circa 1920



ADVAITA PRIMER

An Introduction

T. S. VISWANATHA SHARMA

THE following series of articles is a modest set of steps towards understanding the teachings of Advaita. There are many schools and sub-schools of Advaita and it is not the intention of this series to be either exhaustive in covering all the differences nor is it an academic rendering of Advaita. Our intention is to assist the devotees of Bhagavan understand to some degree the metaphysical and philosophical background that was taken for granted in many recorded conversations between Bhagavan and the devotees. Without such background knowledge the general reader cannot grasp the subtle arguments and thrust of Bhagavan's teachings. His immediate devotees were alive to the language of Advaita and its doctrine which best describes the state he perpetually experienced.

The word Advaita is the clue from which the journey can begin. It means 'not two'. It is a denial firstly of the separation between ourselves and the Supreme Reality and secondly, ourselves and the external world. In the final understanding there is no duality; there is no difference between the Reality and the Knower of Reality.

Advaita should not be confused with Monism. Advaita does not say all is one. The sense of one infers the series two, three and so on.

T. S. Viswanatha Sharma is a keen student of Advaita and Sri Bhagavan. He has visited many holy places including Tiruvarur, Chidambaram, Varanasi and Badrinath. Wherever he may go, he says, he thinks of Arunachala.

And when we say one there is the implication of not only a series but also its compliment, that is, in this case, zero. No such series exists in Advaita because in the ultimate analysis neither the concept of multiplicity nor its opposite exists. All it can indicate at this point is there are no two separate things, hence the term not-two.

From what we know of written records the first significant reference to the term Advaita was made by Gaudapada, who according to tradition was the teacher of Govinda, the reputed teacher of Shankara. Gaudapada is the only guru known to us prior to Sankara who gave a rational explanation of Advaita. He was the originator of a new tradition which is still very much alive today. On the basis of the revealed teachings of the Vedas, he instigated a new approach applying logic and analysis of our experience in a rigorous, unswerving quest for what is 'Real'. According to tradition, Gaudapada did *tapas* deep in the Himalayas at Badrinath where he worshipped and was guided by the presiding deity Narayana, who revealed to him the secrets of Advaita. There is endless speculation about the dates of Gaudapada and Shankara. The dates vary wildly though the general consensus is they lived during the late seventh and early eighth centuries.

Gaudapada wrote a Karika, a commentary, on the Mandukya Upanishad. In it he developed a viewpoint respecting the sole reality of Atman and the qualified nature of our ordinary experience. It is in this Karika we find explicit reference to the method in Vedanta called '*vichara*', enquiry. He demonstrated that the non-dual *atman* declared in the Upanishads as the ultimate reality is a metaphysical truth. The most startling outcome from the Karika is that by logic Gaudapada disproves the reality of causation and posits the theory of *Ajatavada* according to which Brahman or Reality never became the universe. He wrote that it is impossible to prove that the one Reality became the multiplicity by a mysterious act because the diversity never existed in the first place. We occupy ourselves with objects whose value is no more than appearance.

Shankara's genius is such that he was able in the course of a short life to break the moulds of the past traditions in the *sanatana dharma* and create through the teachings of Advaita a common basis of

understanding which did not conflict with the wrangling sects tearing apart the fabric of Hindu philosophy and culture at that time. He revivified the true doctrines based on the Vedas by his erudite and stimulating commentaries of the principal Upanishads; the Bhagavad Gita; Brahma Sutras and texts such as Vivekachudamani. He demonstrated the uniformity of the knowledge of Brahman.

The teachings of Advaita, due to the extraordinary efforts of Shankara, were recognized where he established mutts in the four corners of India which propagated them. From thereon Advaita exerted a profound influence on the philosophy, culture and social life of the country. Any further developments of Vedanta whether in favour of or against Advaita were for the most part measured on the basis of Shankara's interpretations. In the south of India in particular, there was a strong influence of Advaitic tradition which infused the thinking and perceptions both of householders as well as *sadhus*.

Bhagavan, after his first years at Arunachala of complete silence and exclusion from all social contact, was asked by the various seekers attracted to him questions relating to their own *sadhana* or about the various theories concerning Reality. Bhagavan recognised in the teachings of Advaita enough similarities for him to employ the language of Advaita to teach and illustrate his own experiences. Later in life, when asked if his teachings were the same as Shankara's he replied:

"Maharshi's teaching is only an expression of his own experience and realisation. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara's."

D.: Quite so. Can it be put in other ways to express the same realisation?

M.: A realised person will use his own language. Sri Bhagavan added: SILENCE is the best language. (Talk 189)

Advaita, contrary to what some may think, does not deny the existence of the world but it does deny the reality of an independent existence apart from this Reality which in Sanskrit is called Brahman. "The offering is Brahman, the clarified butter is Brahman, in the fire of Brahman offered by Brahman, by seeing Brahman in actions, he reaches Brahman alone." (Bh. Gita IV, 24) The world and man are forms in which Brahman appears but they are not real in their own

right. They exist but they are not real. It is a very fine line of discrimination that has immense ramifications. In respect to the prickly question whether the world is real or not Bhagavan made clear statements in this respect:

A visitor: "The Supreme Spirit (Brahman) is Real. The world (*jagat*) is illusion," is the stock phrase of Sri Sankaracharya. Yet others say, "The world is reality". Which is true?

M.: Both statements are true. They refer to different stages of development and are spoken from different points of view. The aspirant (*abhyasi*) starts with the definition, that which is real exists always; then he eliminates the world as unreal because it is changing. It cannot be real; 'not this, not this!' The seeker ultimately reaches the Self and there finds unity as the prevailing note. Then, that which was originally rejected as being unreal is found to be a part of the unity. Being absorbed in the Reality, the world also is Real. There is only being in Self-Realisation, and nothing but being. Again Reality is used in a different sense and is applied loosely by some thinkers to objects." (Talk 33)

The purpose of our search or enquiry is not to discover the reality because That is already ever-present, but to develop the discrimination and detachment to 'see'. It is only after the fact, the realization that we can actually make sense of all the deficient, descriptive words.

If we are already That then why do we struggle? Why do we search? Why do we question? It is a paradox our minds can never adequately explain. We already are That and yet it seems, we think we are not. There is apparently an infinite gap which no amount of explanation can bridge.

Advaita veiled implication is why do we think we are other than That which we are in truth? Bhagavan when he taught did so not to give or explain something alien to the respective individual. He guided the individual to see he already was That. The problem for Bhagavan, if one may put it that way, was to understand and remove the ignorance of the seeker and why they did not see for themselves. There was nothing to give, nothing to take. Bhagavan recognized the Supreme Reality in us all.

From the Notebooks

One

Robert Powell

Time is an invention, a creation of the mind. During dreamless sleep, time does not exist. That is why one may wake up from deep sleep that lasted only a couple of hours and think one has slept the whole night. In dreams, there is time because the mind is active, but it is a different time from that existing during the waking state. Finally, even in the waking state, during pure perception without mentation of any kind, a state exists without time. Likewise, during sleep space does not exist. But in the waking and dream states, space is created by the activities of the sense organs and the brain.

* * *

Does the body actually exist? We perceive the body with the senses, but the senses are themselves part of the body. So what this amounts to only is that the body says that the body exists. This makes its testimony immediately suspect, for it is tantamount to taking at face value the statement of the thief that he is honest.

Ultimately, we can say only that there are sensate impressions (being perceived by the senses). But what is the meaning of that,

Robert Powell was born in Amsterdam in 1918. Trained as an industrial chemist, he later became a science writer and editor. He has written numerous books on the teachings of J. Krishnamurti, Sri Ramana Maharshi and in particular Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. He lives in La Jolla, California.

how can this statement be further reduced in terms of ultimate reality? It cannot. All statements about reality are void. This is the beginning of the seeing into the Emptiness, the beginning of true wisdom.

* * *

Once one has seen conclusively that one is no longer that exclusive structure of flesh and bone that one had habitually called 'I' or 'me,' then one is free from any idea of differentiation in and of reality. One looks into this boundless Emptiness, which is at once the Plenitude. This is advaita – the insight into the true nature of what is.

* * *

In true advaita or non-duality, there is no denial of the existence of good and evil, but these are considered as inherently and necessarily co-existent with the Universe, the mind, space-time. As is stated so succinctly in the *Ashtavakra Gita*, "The Universe is merely a mode of the mind; in reality it has no existence." Just as in a dream we are emoted by all kinds of things which upon awakening are seen to be products of a restless mind, so upon awakening to our real condition, we understand that our waking state experiences are equally the products of a dream factory and that in the Absolute none of these things exists. Therefore, the only way of coming to terms with 'evil,' and participating in the Bliss that is our birthright is by transcending the limitations of body, mind and world.

* * *

Reality can never give rise to unreality, since what flows from existence will inevitably be in the realm of existence. But the alternative does not add up either, for what is illusory or non-existent cannot give rise to Existence or to anything for that matter. A fruitful example of the use of Reason in *vichara* or spiritual inquiry!

* * *

Truth depends on a frame of reference, reality does not. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

Turn Eastwards

PASCALINE MALLET

In the second edition of Self-Realization, *B. V. Narasimha Swami included a short excerpt from a book entitled* Turn Eastwards *by Pascaline Mallet who visited the ashram in 1937. For reasons unknown this excerpt was deleted from the subsequent editions. We have included here the majority of the chapter on Bhagavan and the ashram.*

LEAVING Adyar with the intention of returning shortly, after the rush of the (Theosophical) Congress was over, we were on our way to visit a great Indian saint living in North Arcot, some twelve hours' journey from Madras. We knew practically nothing about him, but felt that this was a unique occasion of coming perhaps into contact with an Eastern sage or yogi, some descendant – who knows? – of the great Rishis of old who trod the sacred soil of India, spreading the spiritual wisdom and expounding the eternal truths.

We were full of the spirit of adventure, with a keen sense of interest and appreciation of all we saw and heard. Not that we had put aside altogether the faculty of judgment and discrimination, but that we endeavoured so to attune ourselves to the Indian life

that we should not let any preconceived ideas or European habits and customs colour our perceptions and reactions to unfamiliar surroundings and events. The first thing to remember when travelling in India is that one must be quite indifferent as to how or when one's destination is reached. Information about trains varying according to the officials, one must trust to luck whether one gets anywhere at the prescribed time. This observation is based on experience in the present instance. Having been wrongly informed at Madras, we missed the junction where we should have changed train in the middle of the night and found ourselves at dawn a few hundred miles out of our way, arriving eventually ten hours later than was expected.

The landscape was the most beautiful we have yet seen. Rice fields alternating with palm-tree woods made patches of vivid green as the tender shoots began to pierce the blue mirrors of the water-covered earth, or a deep orange where the crops were ready to be cut. Groups of women in bright-coloured *sarees* were engaged in dividing the rice plants, while the men ploughed the muddy ground with the aid of meek-eyed cows. Here and there small villages with thatched-roofed houses nestled amongst the banana trees, and herds of goats and lean-looking cattle roamed about in search of scant food. During the heat of the day the buffaloes were seen lying in some pond or lake with only their heads protruding above the water. Low mountains and big solitary rocks appeared in the plain, like islands above the surface of the sea, taking the shapes of pagodas, temples, and elephants. It was interesting to note how often the architecture in India seems to be inspired by Nature, and how it harmonizes with the very aspect of the country.

A temple was seen in the distance, with its four great *gopurams* rising above a town situated at the foot of a bare mountain of red granite, and the train finally stopped at the tiny station of Tiruvannamalai. We soon found ourselves sitting, or more exactly lying, in a *bandy*, a two-wheeled bullock carriage, in which people and luggage can be piled up in the narrow space comprised between the wooden bottom and the oval-shaped hood. The driver squatted

on his heels in front, or, with amazing equilibrium, stood erect on the shafts, using freely his tongue and whip. Tamil was unknown to us, but at the mere mention of the *asram* he nodded, and off we trotted through the growing dusk, passing along the outskirts of the town, by tanks and small temples and wayside shrines. Europeans are seldom seen in such out-of-the-way places, and our arrival created quite a sensation amongst the people when they caught sight of our Western clothes.

Suddenly we turned off the main road and stopped under a giant mango at the entrance to the *asram.* A few steps brought us in front of two or three low buildings hidden behind the trees. We were not expected, but all who come are welcome, whoever they may be, and after a few words of explanation we were led to the hall where Sri Ramana Maharshi is always to be found. Two lamps, suspended from the ceiling, shed their light on the assembled Indians sitting cross-legged on the tiled floor. At one end of the room and immediately facing the door was a low couch or wooden bed, where a silent, motionless figure was reclining, lost in deep meditation, oblivious, it would seem, of everybody and everything.

To look into his eyes, shining like stars, was to know the meaning of Eternity and to be caught up into a bliss that passed understanding

We slipped in quietly, after having saluted in Indian fashion, and seated ourselves on the ground amongst the crowd. I took in slowly the strange un-forgettable scene, my whole attention fixed on that central figure, whose calm majesty, serene strength, and perfect poise seemed to fill the whole place with unutterable peace. To look into his eyes, shining like stars, was perhaps for the first time to know the meaning of Eternity and to be caught up into a bliss that passed understanding. Who was this Great One? On what rung of the ladder of human or super-human evolution did he stand? Such questions

have but little value. When the sun shines, does one need to know why and how it shines? Will the thirsty man hesitate to drink the cool water which is offered him till he be told whence it comes? Stilling the turbulent mind, ever seeking intellectual explanations, I opened my heart to the spiritual life which radiated so intensely in the silence.

A few Brahmins now entered, wearing freshly washed *dhoties,* the sacred thread of their caste visible on their bare chests, and on their foreheads the three white horizontal stripes indicating the worshippers of Siva. They prostrated themselves before the Maharshi and took their seats beside his couch. First one, then the others, intoned the sacred *mantrams,* chanting in Sanscrit the verses of the ancient Vedas. At the end, all stood for the final praise, and I had the impression of being as it were surrounded by a sea of fiery power, welding all present into a great flame rising heaven-wards. Then once more all prostrated themselves and resumed their places. Not once did that silent figure turn or move, or show any sign of interest in the proceedings. It was as if he had been living in a sphere beyond the limitations of time and space.

The trend of my thoughts was broken by the metallic sound of a gong, after which people began to leave the hall. Maharshi, having come out of *samadhi,* spoke for the first time and exchanged a few words in Tamil with some of the *Swamis.* Arrangements for our stay were immediately made, and Mr. Paul Brunton (author of *A Search in Secret India),* who was living in town, very kindly offered us his hospitality, which we gratefully accepted. We were asked to come in to supper and were taught the rudiments of good behaviour according to Indian customs. Before entering the dining-hall, shoes have to be taken off and hands and feet washed under running water. The guests then sit down cross-legged on the floor all round a long empty room, before a freshly cut banana leaf. Brahmins bearing rice, *dahl,* vegetables, plantains, curds, etc., deposit on these natural plates the required amount. The etiquette demands that the left hand shall touch nothing, the right alone being used to mix and carry the food to the mouth.

All waited till Maharshi had begun before starting their own meal. We found ourselves beside a few Europeans: our host, a Pole, and a young Dutchman recently arrived.

Our noble but clumsy efforts at eating properly created some amusement, and Maharshi, whom we found possessed a strong sense of humour, smiled kindly at us. Supper passed practically in silence, and was over in barely ten minutes. As soon as it ended the leaves were taken outside and disposed of in the garden, after which the washing of hands and mouth was duly performed. After our journey and our many experiences, we felt glad to follow our kind host back to town and retire early to rest.

He seemed to take a keen interest in everything that happened in the world

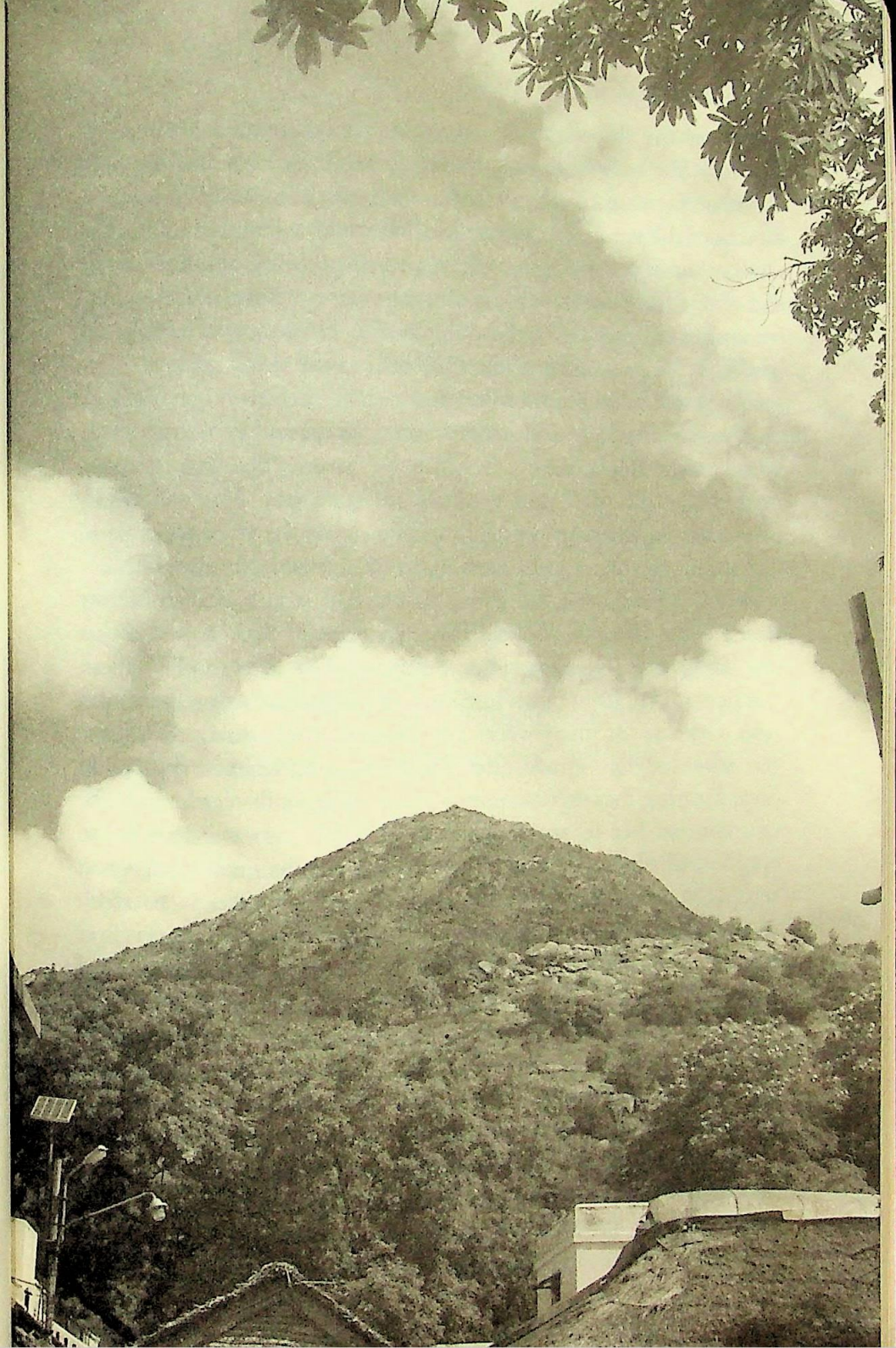
Preparations were in full swing for the great annual festival on Maharshi's birthday. It is an occasion for thousands of people, from all over the country, to get his *darshan* and receive his blessing, and all who come find food and shelter. A wide flat space in front of the *asram* was being made into a vast hall by means of a simple wooden trellis-work, the walls consisting of straw mats which made a very effective protection against the hot sun. As we entered Maharshi was busy writing, and reading letters and newspapers. He seemed to take a keen interest in everything that happened in the world, but somehow I had the feeling that all the while he was living in a state where time and space do not exist, neither relative knowledge nor ignorance, above the 'pairs of opposites', in the region of the Absolute, at the very heart of the universe. This can hardly be described, much less proved, and only dimly sensed, but even so constituted a never-to-be-forgotten experience. His utter impersonality and supreme detachment did not in the very least exclude an all-embracing compassion, sympathy, and understanding of the many problems and difficulties which were continually being submitted to him by all the weary sorrow-stricken people who came to him in the hope of finding comfort and help. Rich and poor,

men, women, and children, Brahmins or outcasts, he looked upon all alike.

In India, the caste system is still very rigid, and Brahmins will not usually sit with outcastes or be touched by them. But for one who has reached the highest spiritual realization life is seen and known as one, and such distinctions have no longer any meaning or value. Thus, though Maharshi is of a Brahmin family, he is now no longer subjected to rules of caste and in his asram all are welcome. Indeed, his personal attendant was an outcaste, showing that in his eyes all are equal. Moreover, this is not limited to human beings, but includes the animal kingdom as well.

There are many beautiful and touching stories testifying to his love and compassion for our younger brothers. In his presence wild animals forget to fight or kill each other and do no harm to man. A cobra used to come into the hall without ever attacking anyone and even stayed peacefully beside its most bitter enemy, a peacock, another inmate of the asram. Maharshi forbids ill-treatment or killing of any living thing, and all unconsciously feel that here they are perfectly safe. The little black-striped squirrels run in and out, birds build their nests under the rafters, and monkeys peep in occasionally to steal some food. One day the people were complaining to Maharshi about these last visitors and declared that soon, if they were not frightened away, there would be so many that nobody would be able to remain in the asram. Maharshi then remarked with his usual humour that in that case the monkeys would have him all to themselves.

Maharshi's favourite cow, Lakshmi, is a most beautiful creature, with delicate horns and almond-shaped eyes. The love she showed for her master was very touching. As we were sitting in the asram, we heard a noise outside, and to our amazement up the steps came Lakshmi, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a cow to enter a room, and went straight up to Maharshi's couch. He at once greeted her most affectionately and ordered that she should be given some plantains to eat. Lakshmi, then quite satisfied, turned round and began to make her way through the crowd, heedless of the people



seated on the floor; she was eventually guided out amid general laughter. She it is who gives Maharshi a calf each year on his very birthday. Let science offer an explanation if it can. When an animal, inmate of the asram, is about to die, Maharshi will attend to it in the same manner as he does to a human being, sitting beside it to the end with a hand on its head. He sees the same life in all, although he recognizes differences in the outer forms. His vision of equality is based on the realization of the One behind the many.

Twice a day, in the morning and evening before sunset, he goes out for a short walk by himself, up the sacred mountain of Arunachala which rises immediately behind the asram, bearing his only possessions, a stick and a black coconut pot. His tall, well-proportioned figure is seen climbing slowly up the steep rocky path, like some mountain god returning to his heavenly abode.

Many legends are told about Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, the Pillar of Fire, the dwelling-place of Siva. It is said that one day in their Himalayan home Parvati, Siva's wife, in playfulness, put her hand in front of her lord's eyes. At once the earth was plunged into darkness for many weeks and months. Great discontent broke out amongst the mortals, and complaints soon reached the ears of Siva. Hearing that this calamity was due to his wife's carelessness, he condemned her to roam in penance, from one sacred shrine to another, till she won forgiveness. It is told, as she knelt in the great temple of Tiruvannamalai, Siva appeared to her on Arunachala Hill in the shape of a column of fire, in sign that her trial was over. Ever since, during the Karthikai Festival, in November and December of each year, when the Deity of the Saivite temple is adored, a fire is lit on the top of the mountain, which may be seen from a great distance burning day and night. All who catch sight of it prostrate themselves in adoration, worshipping the visible and outward fire, symbolizing the inner divine flame which ever burns in each man's heart.

Thousands of people flock to this place of pilgrimage, made doubly sacred by the presence of Maharshi. It is said that Arunachala is older even geologically than the Himalayas and belongs to the ancient continent of Lemuria. No trees are to be seen amongst the great

boulders of red granite; only high grass, bushes, and prickly cactus. Towards the evening the whole mountain seems to be on fire as the last rays of the sun intensify the natural colour of the rock. Brown vultures are poised motionless in the clear sky, the call of the goat-herds alone breaks the silence, and as far as the eye can reach the plain, dotted with palm groves and innumerable lakes, stretches to the distant mountains.

A striking characteristic of the asram consists in all the offerings brought to Maharshi by the various devotees and visitors being immediately shared by all present. Thus, when plantains, oranges, fried pastry rich with pepper and spices, sugarcane or other delicacies are presented, a small part is at once handed back to the donor as *prasad*, and after Maharshi has taken a minute portion, the rest is equally distributed to all. When a personal gift is offered which he is unable to share, it is invariably refused, and he gives it back to the person with the injunction to use it with his benediction.

There is never the slightest feeling of compulsion and no attempt is made to impose on the visitors any special religious belief

Perfect freedom, we found, is also maintained at the asram. All are allowed to come and go at any time and do whatever they feel like doing. The only strict rule we noticed is that of non-smoking in the hall. There is never the slightest feeling of compulsion and no attempt is made to impose on the visitors any special religious belief. Those who wish to read Maharshi's books are welcome to do so, but there is no obligation. Some people ask questions, and Maharshi always answers in the most illuminating fashion, sometimes by questioning the questioner. Others prefer to meditate and keep silent, often finding that their mental doubts and personal problems have been solved without the help of spoken words.

'Know thyself' is the fundamental note of the Maharshi's teaching, and the quest of Self is continually stressed and described as the one essential prerequisite to spiritual attainment. All religions are but various ways leading ultimately to this one point, when inner personal experience and first-hand knowledge begin to replace blind faith in religious or ethical precepts. And what indeed are books, however sacred and beautiful, when under our very eyes we can look upon one who has realized in himself the highest spiritual state? Undoubtedly, merely to live in his presence is the greatest help that one could possibly receive. It is a fact that no one who comes to the asram, whether for consolation, spiritual enlightenment, or even out of mere curiosity, goes away empty-handed. Each receives to his utmost capacity, be that capacity great or small, and many people get inner experiences which have changed their whole lives.

There are many things one learns in India, and one of them is to be able to concentrate in whatever circumstances. This faculty is very common among Indians, who do not seem to mind or notice ordinary disturbance. In the asram, for instance, there is a continual coming and going; some people sing devotional songs, others talk, and babies cry. In the midst of all this meditation is carried on. It proves easy near Maharshi, because the whole atmosphere is one of high concentration and inner stillness. A room in a neighbouring hut had been put at our disposal, so that we might take some rest during the hottest hours of the day without having to go back to town.

There was a mat on the floor and we were able to lie down and sleep. An Indian can go off to sleep at any time, even in the middle of a crowd, and would, no doubt, be very surprised if a European complained of the noise. In the room next door several people were also 'resting', but talking to each other at the top of their voices, oblivious of any neighbours – a splendid opportunity of acquiring the above-mentioned faculty.

We followed the suggestion of some friends at the asram, and purchased sarees; we should have dressed sooner as Indian ladies but were somewhat shy in doing so, not knowing how it would be

considered. How much more beautiful and dignified than our fashionable European clothes are these simple garments, requiring neither to be cut nor sewed. We learnt how to handle the stuff in the proper South Indian manner, making numerous pleats in front for the skirt, the last piece coming up across the front to the left shoulder and hanging loosely over the right one. It was also much more convenient for sitting down on the ground, cross-legged, and proved a good protection against the mosquitoes, as it was easy to envelop oneself entirely in the wide folds. We also adopted the Indian fashion of covering our heads with a part of the saree and using a sort of black umbrella against the sun, as everybody does in the South, discarding once for all the objectionable topee. We wore nothing on our feet but sandals, and whenever possible, when the ground was not too hot, preferred going barefoot.

Upon all alike rested an infinite peace and blessing never to be forgotten

This year Maharshi's birthday fell on the full moon of January. When we got to the asram hundreds of people had already arrived. We found the usual room deserted, and following the direction of the crowd we entered a larger hall near by, opposite to a small shrine built over the place where Maharshi's mother is buried. The walls were decorated with garlands of bright-yellow flowers, giving a very festive air. We were shown to a corner immediately behind Maharishi's couch, from whence we could take in the whole scene without being in the bustle of the crowd. For several hours there was a steady flow of people. They entered silently in single file, bowed or prostrated before Maharshi and left at his feet some simple offering of fruit or sugar. All the while he sat motionless, lost in *samadhi*, at other times glancing at a passing pilgrim, perhaps at a little child, or at some poor woman pouring out before him her deep devotion or sorrow-laden heart. Upon all alike rested an infinite peace and blessing never to be forgotten.

The midday meal was served in the newly erected hall, as well as out of doors. It was no easy matter to fill ten thousand hungry mouths. When one set of meals was over, the people quickly made room for others waiting their turn, and so on till all were satisfied. It was a striking sight: the hundreds of outcastes of distinct Dravidian type; the men bare except for a loincloth, the women clad in mauve *sarees,* and the children naked, all crouching on the ground in long rows, in front of banana leaves heaped with rice and vegetables. Once a year they are thus able to satisfy their hunger and eat as much as they like. In the evening a second repast was served, after which the crowds began to leave.

It was a magic night. The full moon shone brightly; not a breath of air stirred the leaves. We walked back to town in a kind of dream wherein the perfect beauty of Nature blended with an inner feeling of utmost happiness. The night was too wonderful to think of sleeping indoors, so we took our bedding up on to the flat roof of the house. Close by, the great temple, with its six gopurams reminding one of pyramids, rose above the town, and immediately behind, Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, stood out impressively against the starry sky.....

Sri Bhagavan's reference to *Turn Eastwards* in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

18th May, 1938

Talk 494. Sri Bhagavan had gone through *Turn Eastwards* the whole book of Mademoiselle Pascaline Mallet, and spoke for about an hour on that book. He said that the writing is full of feeling and the writer is sincere. The book is written in simple style and finishes off with remembrance of Himself. A few errors here and there might be pointed out to be corrected in subsequent editions. Sri Bhagavan thinks the book well-written. He interprets 'Turn Eastwards' as 'Turn to the Source of Light'. This book is a good supplement to Mr. Brunton's book.

Sorupa Saram

The Essence of One's Own True Nature

SORUPANANDA

SORUPA SARAM (also known as *Swarupa Saram* when it is spelt in the Sanskrit way) is a Tamil advaitic work that was composed by Sorupananda, a distinguished Tamil saint and Guru who lived near Virai, a Tamil town, probably around the end of the sixteenth century. He is associated historically with Tattvarayar, an eminent scholar who was also his sister's son. The following biographical information about them has been taken from a Tamil introduction to *Sorupa Saram*:[1]

Sorupananda and Tattvarayar were fluent in Sanskrit and Tamil, and both were learned in all the *sastras*. However, the true realisation dawned upon them that the profit to be gained from this limited knowledge, however praiseworthy, did not have the power to grant freedom from birth in the way that true knowledge does. They realised that it showed a lack of judgement on their part to devote their

[1] *Sorupa Saram*, pub. Kasyapa Nagarajan, 1971.

time any longer to the acquisition of this limited knowledge, which confers advantages in this life only. By doing so, they would waste a human birth, something that is very hard to attain. Since they were both overcome by a desire to free themselves from worldly attachments, they devoted themselves to the task of seeking out a *Sadguru* who could bestow *jnana*.

Having made this resolution, the two of them, before leaving their dwelling-place, made an agreement with one another: 'Whichever of us is first to obtain the fortune of a Guru's *darshan*, he shall assume the position of Guru to the other.'

They then set out on a pilgrimage, Sorupananda to the South, and Tattvarayar to the North. Upon the banks of the Kaveri, in a holy place called Govattam, Sorupananda had a miraculous experience in which he attained a tranquillity of mind that had thus far eluded him.

'This occurrence is due to the presence here of some great *mahatma*,' he decided.

Upon consulting the learned people in that place, he discovered that a great being called Sri Sivaprakasa Swami dwelt there in a patch of rushes, immersed in perpetual *samadhi*. However, he ascertained that on a few occasions he had been known to come outside in the morning time.

Going immediately to the holy presence of that *Sadguru*, he waited until Sivaprakasa Swami emerged from his state of absorption and came outside. Making obeisance in the proper manner, he beseeched him to accept him as his devotee. When he had received the Guru's grace, Sorupananda waited for Tattvarayar's return.

Tattvarayar had travelled to the North, but he had not obtained the *darshan* of any Guru. When he lost all hope of doing so, he gave up his search and returned to the South. On his way, he had the good fortune to meet Sorupananda, who by that time had realised the Self. Tattvarayar then received the grace of his uncle.

Whilst Sorupananda and Tattvarayar were peacefully dwelling in this way as Guru and disciple, Sorupananda one day ordered that oil be brought for an oil bath. Since that day was *amavasai* [new moon],

the disciple was acutely aware of the sastraic injunction that an oil bath was forbidden on the day of the ancestors.

'But today is *amavasai*,' he said.

On hearing this, Sorupananda said: "What have all the prohibitions of the *sastras* to do with *sadhus*? Although you have dwelt in my presence for so many days, you remain unable to free yourself from the constraints of the *sastras*. Is there really any advantage in your remaining here any longer?"

Thus, by means of this question and answer, he confirmed his suspicion that for Tattvarayar birth was not yet at an end. Tattvarayar was shocked by these compassionate words from his Guru. Realising that he had not yet succeeded in eliminating his *vasanas*, he was filled with remorse.

He came to the following decision: "Rather than remaining here and besmirching the holy presence of my Guru, it would be better to drown this sinful block beneath the ocean."

Then, realising that it was forbidden to turn one's back on the Guru, he retired, moving slowly backwards.

When Tattvarayar was leaving in this way, meditating on his Guru, the devotees who were accompanying him took down the gems of truth that came out of his lips as divine utterances and submitted them to Sorupananda. These are recorded in *jnana* texts that are cherished even today.

When Sorupananda saw these works he was astonished by their profundity. Realising in his heart that such a sea of learning did not deserve to drown in the watery ocean, he commanded Tattvarayar to return to his presence.

As soon as Tattvarayar returned Sorupananda said to him: "These difficult works, useful as they are to yourself, will not easily benefit the world as a whole. Compose, therefore, a simple work that everyone may understand and win salvation from."

After giving this command, Sorupananda went off to eat. In accordance with his Guru's wishes Tattvarayar composed and completed *Cacivanna Bodham* while his Guru was still eating. This work became part of the *Mohavatai Bharani*.

Ramana Maharshi was particularly fond of the next development in the story. This is how he narrated the story. The extract is from *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21st November 1945:

> Tattvarayar composed a *bharani* [a kind of poetical composition in Tamil] in honour of his Guru, Sorupananda, and convened an assembly of learned pandits to hear the work and assess its value. The pandits raised the objection that a *bharani* was only composed in honour of great heroes capable of killing a thousand elephants, and that it was not in order to compose such a work in honour of an ascetic. Thereupon the author said, "Let us all go to my Guru and we shall have this matter settled there". They went to the Guru and, after all had taken their seats, the author told his Guru the purpose of their coming there. The Guru sat silent and all the others also remained in *mauna*. The whole day passed, night came, and some more days and nights, and yet all sat there silently, no thought at all occurring to any of them and nobody thinking or asking why they had come there. After three or four days like this, the Guru moved his mind a bit and thereupon the assembly regained their thought activity. They then declared, "Conquering a thousand elephants is nothing beside this Guru's power to conquer the rutting elephants of all our egos put together. So certainly he deserves the *bharani* in his honour!"

Though Tattvarayar was the author of many verses (most of which have disappeared) Sorupananda himself only wrote one poem. This was *Sorupa Saram*, a distillation of his advaitic experience. This work was highly regarded by Ramana Maharshi. When he gave Annamalai Swami a list of six books to read, he included *Sorupa Saram* on a list that also included *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, *Ribhu Gita*, *Ashtavakra Gita*, *Ellam Ondre*, and *Yoga Vasishta*. This recommendation puts the text in very distinguished company.

This is the first-ever English translation of *Sorupa Saram*. It has been translated by Dr T. V. Venkatasubramanian and Robert Butler and edited by David Godman. The verses themselves are by

Sorupananda and the interpolated questions, answers and comments are by a later, unknown commentator. However, these additional remarks have always been associated with the work and they are now regarded as being an integral part of it. The final paragraph of each numbered verse was written by Sorupananda.

Benedictory Verse Addressed to the Self

1. May the unique Self, which appears as various objects in the same way that gold takes the shape of the mould into which it is cast, be our support and guide for composing this work, *Sorupa Saram*, which proclaims that the nature of the world is only consciousness.

Text

2. Since the three kinds of differences do not exist, everything is only consciousness. The certainty of the existence of consciousness is stated in this way.

   Since there is nothing at all that is different from consciousness, the five elements, along with the five senses and the five organs of sense, all these are consciousness only. Whatever is in the beginning, in the middle and in the end – all these are also consciousness. The indescribable illusion is also consciousness. The one who perceives everything and the act of perceiving are also consciousness.

3. **Question:** Is there a logical way of concluding that everything is consciousness alone?
   Answer: Yes, there is.

   All the world's diversity, which derives from the misperceptions of the mind and which appears to be real – is it not the witnessing consciousness alone? Hence, everything – beginning with liberation and including purity and impurity, joy and misery, that which is and that which is not – is only being.

4. **Question:** If all is being, do objects appear as one's own Self, which is being-consciousness-bliss?

Answer: Yes, they do.

In whichever direction I look there is absolute perfection. The real nature of all the holy waters is blissful consciousness. The real nature of all the verses praising the Lord is bliss. Apart from me, what other form can exist?

5. **Question:** Is the above statement merely verbal or is it experienced?
Answer: It is experienced as well.

My Guru instructed: 'Sir, the world appearance and its substratum – all these are you. There is no one who does not say "I". Therefore enquire thoroughly into the "I".' If this is known intently and thoroughly [one can say] 'I myself am pure consciousness'. Hence, I am the primal entity.

6. **Question:** Which entity had this experience of the Self, and when did the experience arise?
Answer: It is experienced by myself and the experience is ever-present.

I saw my real nature as pure consciousness. I see only myself, and not the great multitude of the world. Simply because I had not looked at myself thoroughly, did I at any time cease to exist?

7. **Question:** If everything is only the Self, why are the names many?
Answer: The many names do not make the Self multiple.

Since everyone abides as 'I' and declares himself to be 'I', right up to Iswara there is nothing other than 'me'. The same person is addressed differently as son, brother and father; but for that reason will the body of the person become different?

8. **Question:** If so, the known and the knower will be different.
Answer: No, they won't be different.

It is my Self who remained as the [seer] 'I'. Those objects that were rejected as 'not I' – these too are my Self. It is like someone who goes to sleep at night as himself, manifests [in dream] as the form of [the seer and] the world and then wakes up as himself.

9. **Question:** What is the inherent nature of the Self that shone as everything?
Answer: It is 'shining by itself as itself'.

The Self that shines as the body, as the beloved soul, as all the actions, as ignorance, as the enjoyment of true knowledge, as the blissful reality and as the one consciousness – that indeed is my own real nature.

10. **Question:** Is it possible to give a true name to the Self that shines by itself?
Answer: As it is a transcendental experience, it is not possible to give it a name.

They will describe it as bliss, as transcendence, and as the witness of all that remains at the culmination of the four *Vedas*. What designation might I apply to my real nature, which all the treatises on *jnana* are unable to track down?

11. **Question:** If it is transcendent, there is no scope for enquiry. It is therefore necessary to indicate and signify it in some way.
Answer: As it is everything and as it is nothing, it is beyond description.

Is it 'I'? Is it That? Am I That? Is That 'I'? Is it shining *jnana*? Is it the source of all sounds [*nadanta*]? Is it *mauna*? Is it the pure state [*suddha*]? Is it a void? The self-shining natural state is all these and none of them.

12. **Question:** If it is said like this, none can realise the Self, and so there can be no realisation. Hence, a name should be given.
Answer: The following are the names given by the *Vedas*.

Enlightenment is 'I'; liberation is 'I'; perfect bliss is 'I'; being is 'I'; consciousness is 'I'; tranquillity is 'I'; purity is 'I'; that which is unique and beyond the scope of the *Vedas* is 'I'; pure consciousness, the source of all, is 'I'.

13. **Question:** Are all these descriptions experienced?

Answer: They are experienced and also transcended.

My son! I became and dwelt as the indescribable experience, transcendental joy, and everything else. I felt no need to declare, 'I have rid myself of the misery-causing karma'. I recovered my Self and have been freed.

14. **Question:** What is the benefit arising from this experience?
Answer: It is becoming the ruler of the kingdom of liberation.

I obtained the supreme lordship that is never lost. I burned up the pair of opposites – happiness and misery. I gave up the life of the body-forest, which tormented the mind. I entered and occupied the house of liberation.

15. **Question:** What play will this king witness on his stage?
Answer: He will witness the dance of the three *avasthas* [waking, dreaming and sleeping].

In the waking state I will witness the dance of the five organs of action and the five organs of sense. In dream I will witness the dance of the mind. In thought-free sleep I will dance the object-free void-dance. However, I will [always] remain as the exalted essence [the Self].

16. **Question:** Where was this experience when you were regarding happiness and misery as 'I'?
Answer: Then, too, I was remaining as the Self. I was nothing else.

Who was the one who remained as [the ego] 'I'? If I see him, I will not allow him to take up the form of the body. Only the 'I' whose form is consciousness is the real 'I'. All other 'I's will get bound to a form and go through birth and death.

17. **Question:** The Self is immutable. Will it not get bound if it gets involved in activities?
Answer: As the Self remains a witness, like the sun, it will not get bound.

Even if I bear the burdens of the family and have them follow me like a shadow, or even if the cloud called '*maya*' veils, I am,

without doubt, the sun of knowledge, self-shining as pure light and remaining as the witness [of the world].

18. **Question:** But the *jnani* is not remaining motionless like the sun.
Answer: He also remains actionless.

Whatever comes, whatever actions are performed, in whatever I may delight, I am only pure consciousness, remaining aloof and aware, without becoming any of them.

19. **Question:** All things move because the Self makes them move. Hence, is there bondage for the Self?
Answer: Like the rope that makes the top spin, there is no bondage for it.

In the same way that a top is made to spin by a rope, desires fructify in my presence. But, like the rope that is used to spin the top, I will not merge with them. I have rid myself of their connection. I became my own Self. My bondage is indeed gone.

20. **Question:** But what is the way by which knowledge and ignorance was destroyed?
Answer: In one's own experience of the Self neither attainment of knowledge nor removal of ignorance is seen.

By what did ignorance get destroyed? Through what did knowledge gained through enquiry arise? How was the clarity, known as the experience of true knowledge, obtained? Other than myself, what do I know?

21. **Question:** If the dawn of knowledge and the removal of ignorance are not known, how can we call such a one a *jnani*?
Answer: With ignorance removed from knowledge, like unreal from real, becoming both and becoming neither – this indeed is the nature of the *jnani*.

When, ultimately, the real shone as 'I', did the unreal, which became 'I', go anywhere? I myself became the base of both the

real and the unreal, but remained beyond the reach of the conflicting pair of real and unreal.

22. **Question:** Previously it was stated, 'I am the possessor of the body, but not the body'. Now it is said, 'I will remain different from the body and also be the body'. Which is true?
Answer: The truth is remaining in but aloof from the body, like the kernel in the mango seed that remains within the seed shell, but aloof from it.

Oh, I said, 'I am the body!' I regarded wealth as mine! I felt, 'I am the enjoyer!' Are all these not false? Though I remained as everything, beginning with the body, the real 'I' always remained aloof without associating with anything, like the mango kernel in the seed of the sweet mango.

23. **Question:** Is remaining like this [attached and detached] only in the period of ignorance, or also in the period of knowledge?
Answer: It is in both.

The periods of *jnana* and *ajnana* were seen and passed like the periods in which intellect had not developed and in which intellect had developed. Everything that was a superimposition during practice has now become false.

24. **Question:** Is there birth and death during the period of ignorance that exists prior to this experience?
Answer: As these are illusory, they do not exist.

Oh, where was I born? What did I worship as God? Where did I seek refuge? When I became the blissful essence, the reality, experiencing unbroken bliss, were not all these [known to be] false?

25. **Question:** In what condition was the Self before the dawning of this experience?
Answer: When I am redeemed by realisation of the truth, I am not confused any more.

I lived as 'someone'. I laboured in vain for 'somebody'. I underwent change, taking a thousand names. Now, enough of

this! I have seen myself, that which is hard for me to discover. Oh, now I am free!

26. **Question:** What is obtained and experienced if one sees the Self?
Answer: The mind dissolves in love and one becomes *sat-chit-ananda*.

I made the deceitful mind melt and dissolve. I knew myself as I really am. Since I am the substratum for everything, I became and dwelt as myself, the clear ambrosia of *sat-chit-ananda*.

27. **Question:** Is the statement 'The world is only the Self' figuratively true and not literally true?
Answer: Anything seen cannot exist apart from the eye. Similarly, the world does not exist apart from the Self.

Can there be anything seen that is apart from the eye? Can there be anything heard that is apart from the ear? Did any of the other four elements manifest independently of space? Though the world may appear like a flowing mirage-river, when thoroughly examined, can the world exist apart from the Self?

28. **Question:** Seer and seen appear different.
Answer: This is just like seeing gold as various ornaments. They are not different.

Here, other than myself, nothing else exists. I swear to this. A gold ornament does not exist separate from the gold. In the same way that one can change the shape of gold and give it different names, I described my Self in various ways.

29. **Question:** What is the nature of this experience?
Answer: It is the transcendence that arises, dissolving thoughts, and in which everything shines as the Self.

It is beyond the reach of speech and it is beyond the reach of the mind. It is the clear ambrosia with which one does not get satiated, even when it overflows. Like saliva that secretes on the

tongue, it springs forth from within me. Like a dumb pot it remained as 'I', without being another.[2]

30. **Question:** When everything exists as *Sivam*, why should one become *Sivam*?
Answer: This is to enable the removal of all differences of 'one' and 'two' and to become perfect *jnana*.

Do not question, 'What is the bliss of Siva? What is Siva-nature? What is Siva's activity?' It is only the fullness of consciousness that does not get divided, does not unite, and does not become different.

31. **Question:** What is to be rejected as *asat* [unreal], and what is to be accepted as *sat* [reality]?
Answer: Reject objects that are known as *asat* and accept consciousness as *sat*. This is tranquillity.

All the *tattvas* [principles] that one knows are foreign to oneself. While rejecting these objects as 'not-Self', realise the Self through the consciousness that remains as the one who rejects objects. This is tranquillity.

32. **Question:** If tranquillity is the one true thing, what is the witness?
Answer: Tranquillity is itself everything, beginning from the witness right down to *svanubhava* [one's own experience]. It is *Sivam*, the state of realisation.

Tranquillity is itself the witness-Self. The witness-Self is itself *Brahman*. *Brahman* is fullness. The pure fullness realised by enquiry is itself the ever-present *svanubhava*. This is the state of realisation, which is itself *Sivam*.

33. **Question:** Even if the mind subsides, *sayujyam* [union] is attained only when *maya* is destroyed.

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[2] A dumb pot is a spherical, baked mud pot, without a mouth, that absorbs water through its porous skin.

Answer: The destruction of the mind is itself the destruction of *maya*, and hence it is *sayujyam*.

I have seen the way of the birth of the mind that leads to the birth of the world and the birth of the doer, the ego 'I'. The non-subsidence of the mind is itself *maya*. The firmness of those who destroy this *maya* is *sayujyam*.

34. **Question:** If this is *sayujyam*, where will the past karmas go?

Answer: In this experience they will disappear without leaving a trace.

I rid myself of the fear that arises from the misery of imagining, 'I underwent an endless succession of births and deaths'. All of the ancient world has become the vast, empty expanse that is my own Self, since everything other than my Self is false.

35. **Question:** When there is such an experience, why perform karma?

Answer: When this experience has not arisen, actions are performed.

Until I became the endless, blissful experience through the superior wisdom that regards all worship and similar things as the 'not-Self', I worshipped the gods at the prescribed times and observed all the vows.

36. **Question:** Who will attain this experience?

Answer: Only those who are pure and who have the prescribed qualifications will attain it.

The experience of reality – eternally abiding and shining as oneness, as blemishlessness, as fullness, and as truth – is attained only by those who are most qualified, pure, who have a steady mind, and who are undergoing their final birth.

37. **Question:** What are the marks of a pure one?

Answer: They are as follows:

[*The answer is the content of verses 37-42*]

They will not utter harsh words; they will not hate anyone; they will be of cheerful countenance; whatever things they relish, they will not use them for themselves but will offer them to the great ones; they will not associate with evil persons; they will not curse anyone; their eyes will not blaze with anger. These are the ones who will rid themselves of birth.

38. They will not value as real those things that are destructible; they will never speak out, saying, 'This is good and this is bad'; they will not grieve over events of the past; they will not condemn anything; they are the exalted ones.

39. They will not speak contemptuously of the ordinances of the *Vedas*; they will not remain without chanting and melting with devotion as long as they live; they will not forget death; they will not get attached to this world through weakness of mind; they are the ones who will not be born again.

40. They will not experience at all sudden movements of the mind; they will only desire to know the path of salvation; their minds will not get immersed in attachments, saying greedily, 'This is my wealth, my house, my wife and my children'. Such are the mature ones.

41. Will they care for things that are valued by others as desirable and not desirable? When one really looks, those who become tranquil and eternal, who experience truth and abide in the final state are few in number.

42. Those who do not see anything other than their Self here and in the hereafter, who are beyond both and without any division, will they degrade themselves by not regarding as trivial this phantom-like world appearance that is an illusory play of the *sankalpas*?

43. **Question:** *Sastra vasana* [a latent desire for scriptural knowledge], or the *vasanas* of knowledge and ignorance – will these too not arise in those *jnanis* even through forgetfulness?
Answer: As these are *vasanas*, they will not arise.

During every superimposing *avastha* the liberated one clearly knows that the illusion of sound and the illusion of real and unreal are only the illusion of the mind, because [he knows that] the superimposed *avastha* that appears and disappears is false.

44. **Question:** If this is so, for such ones what constitutes the worship of God?
Answer: Worship is only seeing the Self.

The great *tapasvin* devotedly worships with the flower of tranquil space and with the *mantra* of aloneness the deity [who abides as] the expanse of consciousness in the temple of the body. Who can equal those who live forever, revering such *jnanis*?

45. **Question:** Why does everyone not perform this worship?
Answer: Because of ignorance.

When the three prime fruits [mango, jackfruit and banana] along with rice pudding made with milk are right in front of them, they will long for food vomited by a dog. Without knowing that we ourselves are the great essence, the basis of all things and all powers, they become slaves of the mighty.

46. This concerns the fate of those who insult *jnanis*.

They do not know fairness and rectitude; they do not know the phantom-like nature of the world; they do not know themselves; they do not realise the disgrace that arises from their ignorance. They are dark within themselves and without any reason insult those who are good, the righteous. Which way will these people go?

47. **Question:** Are all books, other than those *jnana* scriptures that speak of supreme bliss, not true?

Answer: No, they are not true.

The five flowers are his arrows. The six-legged beetle is the bowstring. The soft sugarcane is his bow. This formless cupid is a valorous warrior. He will infect everyone with powerful lust. All this is false. Similarly, is all this barren world-appearance true? You yourself reply.

48. **Question:** Are time and so on false?
Answer: To those who are not attached to anything, they are certainly false.

Be it time, or God, or karma, or illusory observances, the workings of the mind, the great enthusiasm that accomplishes things – to him who is not attached in any way, where is the question of taking them to be either good or bad?

49. **Question:** Are they [time and so on] at least necessary for the body?
Answer: Since the body is not-Self, they are not needed.

Why are they born, those cunning ones who do not seek their Self? What is this body that has come into being through food? Who is the 'I'? How many were the bodies that were discarded before? Innumerable were the bodies that were taken with delight again and again.

50. **Question:** But are all these [*jivas*] reflected consciousness?
Answer: As there is no knowledge without the guru enabling one to know, they are only reflected consciousness.

To reveal the unreal as unreal and the real as real, truly a guru was needed. Alas! All the *jivas*, becoming kings and achieving greatness,[3] are only reflected consciousness.

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[3] This phrase has been taken to mean 'arrogantly strutting around'. It can also be translated as 'flourishing and becoming like little children'.

51. **Question:** Why should the one *Brahman* appear differentiated as many, as reflected consciousness?

Answer: To those who do not see it as one, it appears as many.

What is the truth of the world reflection that appears in the one [*Brahman*] but does not appear as one? Like the scenes that appear to the vision of a bewildered person, the world appears as many only to those with defective knowledge and who therefore do not see it as the one reality.

52. **Question:** When all is one like this, what is the reason for not seeing it as one?

Answer: I do not know the reason for not knowing the Self that exists as one's own Self.

What a wonder it is that one seeks the Self without knowing the Self! What can I say of this? Know that this is like a person in this world standing [neck-deep] in water having his thirst unquenched. What else can we say?

53. **Question:** What is the way to see the Self?

Answer: By abiding still in the Self. This is the essence of enquiring into the scriptures.

You who, babbling the scriptures, become haughty! You who accumulate karma with your caste and lineage! Can you not become *sattvic*, know your Self through your Self, give up unceasing activity and remain still?

54. **Question:** Can devotion to God be *jnana*?

Answer: There can be no devotion apart from the devotee.

Those who are wallowing, identifying with the body, will perform *puja*, wave lights and bring their palms together in salutation before the idol of the god with much longing, but they will not enquire whether the true God is the worshipper or the idol.

55. **Question:** Is it not necessary to go and see the car festival?
Answer: No. The one who sees the car festival should be seen.

They will go, see, and salute the car on the auspicious day of the car festival. Alas! Leaving their Self, whom are they going to worship? The god seen in the car is not fullness. Does anyone not know this?

56. **Question:** If so, is yoga good?
Answer: For knowing consciousness it is not necessary.

They will practise the highly respected yoga, remaining in a corner and controlling their breath and speech. For seeing and abiding as supreme consciousness, why this *sadhana*? They are attempting to eat and live here for a long time by making the body strong.

57. **Question:** In that case, can *sannyasa* be good?
Answer: True bliss, which is present in those who renounce the ego, is not there in *sannyasa*. How, then, can it be good?

Without any difficulty they will take up a begging bowl in their hands; they will shave their heads and wear only a loincloth; and they will appear to be great ones. But will they also experience the bliss of sleeping without sleeping that is experienced by those who have renounced the ego?

58. **Question:** In that case, are scriptural study and spiritual practice not necessary?
Answer: To those who have seen the Self, which is their true import, they are not necessary.

To see one's Self, what *sastra* is needed? What *sadhana* is necessary? Is not all this a mad game? Those who regard as real the illusion that has arisen – like the imaginary imp created to scare simple-minded people – will not see the Self.

59. **Question:** Is not *sadhana* necessary to know the Self?

Answer: What use is a *sadhana* that does not enable one to see the *sadhaka*?

The objects, which are seen to be many, such as male, female and neuter, and the seer who remains as one – all this is only the manifestation of the excellent consciousness. Can they exist apart from consciousness? However much *sadhana* they practise, how will it be of use for those who do not know this clearly?

60. **Question:** Why do they suffer instead of enquiring and realising the Self?
Answer: They suffer because what they have known to be one by studying has not been experienced.

What does it matter [to the realised one] who lives and in what way? What does it matter [to the realised one] who goes where and in what manner? His solitary state is like that of a bat in its roost. He will be detached in every way and will sleep experiencing the blessed state that never leaves. Bliss is only for him.

61. **Question:** Is it not necessary to know the nature of Iswara and *jiva*?
Answer: Since *Sivam* is non-dual, it is not necessary.

They will say that Iswara is infinite and that *jiva* is finite. They will say that *jiva* is like the eye and that Iswara is like the sun. These two definitely cannot be non-dual. Pure consciousness, which is neither of these two, alone is *Sivam*.

62. **Question:** Then what is the way to attain *Sivam*?
Answer: The way to see one's Self is by rejecting everything else as *maya*.

The inert semen became the foetus and then became alive by mixing with the conscious principle. It appears to be real. When this happens, he who contemplates his real nature, regarding all this as illusory, is *Sivam*.

63. **Question:** Will not those who know the past, present and future become *Sivam*?

Answer: Only those who have seen the Self, which is beyond time, are *Sivam*, not those who know the three periods of time.

The self-effulgent Self destroys both night and day, the two that determine yesterday, today and tomorrow. Hence, he alone is *Sivam* who has become the Self and who consequently worships the auspicious day that remains perpetually as the one unique day.

64. **Question:** If one renounces the *jnana sastras*, how can one attain the bliss of liberation?

Answer: Liberation is only delighting in the Self through tranquillity and without anxiety. When this is attained, what is the use of books?

One may know the *jnana sastras*, or take up good *sannyasa*, or attempt to experience *mauna samadhi*, but the indescribable delight of liberation is simply to become the Self, remaining free of all anxiety, experiencing bliss.

[*continued from verse 64*]

65. He may be endowed with learning, or established in great yoga, or his body and senses may be active, but he who does not merge with supreme grace will not know tranquillity and will not obtain the final reward, the bliss of liberation that never fails.

66. **Question:** If so, do they not have to experience even *prarabdha*?

Answer: If one remains without movement as the Self, like the column supporting the windmill, the *prarabdha* will exhaust itself.

You base, ignorant ones, wallowing in the three types of *prarabdha*![4] If you understand that those who accepted alms will now be donors, you can be like the column that supports the windmill.

67. **Question:** But will not this experience come to everyone?
Answer: If one becomes inward-turned instead of being externalised, this experience will come for everyone.

I declare: 'If their minds are directed inward, attending to the light [the Self], and do not become outward-turned, all those upon this earth are capable of seeing the Self, just as I have seen my Self.'

68. **Question:** Don't *jnanis* have to perform karma?
Answer: Since they have seen the truth of both action and the one who performs the action, they do not have to perform activities.

He who has clearly seen in his mind both the performer of actions and the actions themselves, who has thus redeemed himself and become the reality, will he perform, without fail in every birth, every action at the prescribed time?[5]

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[4] **Bhagavan:** *Prarabdha* [the actions the body has to perform in this life] is of three categories, *iccha, anichha,* and *parechha* [personally desired, without desire and due to others' desire]. For him who has realised his Self, there is no *iccha-prarabdha.* The two others, *anichha* and *parechha* remain.

Whatever he does is for others only. If there are things to be done by him for others, he does them but the results do not affect him. Whatever be the actions that such people do, there is no *punya* [merit] and no *papa* [sin] attached to them. (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 3rd June 1946, p. 65.)

The column that is necessary for the existence and operation of the windmill remains unaffected. Only the sails of the windmill move. Similarly, the Self is unaffected by *prarabdha.* Only the body is affected by it.

[5] This is a rhetorical question for which the assumed answer is 'no'.

69. **Question:** Will the *jnanis* hate the *karmis* [the performers of activities] when they see them?
Answer: They will delight in seeing the *karmis*, in the same way that they witness conjuring tricks, but they will not hate them.

Seeing the deceitful ones who cannot see and enjoy reality as it is and who cannot melt by experiencing it, I rejoiced. However many illusory lotus flowers bloom, is there any anger on the part of the moon?

70. **Question:** How did this experience arise?
Answer: It was obtained providentially through the grace of the Guru.

Like a sweet mango fruit appearing under the thorny *karuvelam* tree, the divine lotus feet of the Guru – who has the power to bestow the grace to transform me into the reality that is sought by everyone, everywhere – came to me who was replete with evil, taking birth over and over again.

71. **Question:** Is getting this experience so difficult?
Answer: It is extremely difficult.

Where is my [state of] remaining as the ego? Where is my attachment? Where is my desire to rule heaven and earth? Siva! Siva! Where is the *jnana* Guru? Where is liberation? How can I express this?[6]

72. **Question:** What is the benefit of this experience?
Answer: It is obtaining the Self that is beyond the mind.

I did not obtain anything other than my Self. I had my Self in my possession all the time. Separate from me, there is no bondage or release. If one sees [this], even the mind that enquires into these is non-existent.

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[6] The wide disparity between his previous wretched state and the state of knowledge makes the author wonder at the greatness of the Guru's grace that accomplished the transformation, and how little he deserved it.

73. **Question:** As soon as one obtains this experience, who should be worshipped?
Answer: The Guru, the 'I' and the body should be worshipped, seeing them as one's own Self.

I will worship as my own Self the gracious Guru who showed everything to be like a conjuror's trick, or the Self that is realised after thus scrutinising everything, or the body-temple that came [into being] to terminate the evil of birth.

74. **Question:** How to get rid of the *vasana* of the gross body?
Answer: It should be rejected by seeing it as the form of food.

You body who remain as the sheath of food! If you do as I tell you, you will experience bliss as long as you live. I swear to this. Do not go near evil and useless *vasanas*. Whatever comes according to *prarabdha*, remain a mere witness.

75. **Question:** How to remove [or be rid of] the senses of perception?
Answer: They should be removed by seeing them as the Self.

O senses! You cherished and nourished me all these years. Now I have become blissful consciousness. Even you, who [appear to] become different from me, I have come to know as my Self. Henceforth, remain one with me, without becoming divergent.

76. **Question:** How to be rid of desires?
Answer: Through desire for realisation of the truth.

O desire! Though I suffered much through you, on account of your help I dwelt in the Self. I reached the *Sadguru* through you. In liberation I have, along with you, become the Self. I swear to this.

77. **Question:** How to destroy anger?
Answer: Through tranquillity.

O anger! Through you I rid myself of my deficiency. Because of the weariness experienced by your rising that invariably produced misery, I rid myself of this danger and dwelt in supreme tranquillity. Even in dream, do not rise up in lamentation, but remain calm.

78. **Question:** How to get rid of avarice?
Answer: By abiding peacefully in the Self.

O avarice! I took you as my relation. Those who do not know the truth say that your form is only sin. You will exert yourself hard merely to accumulate. O sinner! Because of you I am now possessed by peace.

79. **Question:** How to dissolve the mind?
Answer: It should be dissolved in the Self, which is its basis.

O mind! I myself am you. You yourself are me. Despite being so, deceitfully you forgot me. That I am surrendered to you is also true. But do not remain different from me, the reality.

[*The same answer continues in verses 80, 81 and 82.*]

80. My mind! You roamed about, laboured hard and learned many arts, seeking a way to make a living. You sought and gave me a *Sadguru*. To you who were so considerate to me, what help did I render in return?

81. O mind! Just as I once remained, assuming your form, now you have come and merged with me as my own form. Is there anyone like you who values the virtue of gratitude? Dwell henceforth in the loving care of the supreme state, without returning to your prior form.

82. O mind! You remained, right from the beginning, without renouncing love towards me. Through that love you gave me the benefit of cultivating all the virtues of a devotee, beginning with forbearance. You removed desire and its progeny. Now, like me, you remain still through good and proper discernment.

83. **Question:** Will the mind subside through the above means?
Answer: If it is firmly established in the experience of the Self, it will then shine as consciousness and remain still.

As my mind roamed about, I too was similar to it, thus allowing myself to remain in an unquiet state. With my mind remaining

still and motionless, I too remained similar to it, shining and dwelling like gold.

84. **Question:** Are there no likes and dislikes in this experience?
Answer: Since everything is experienced as the Self, these do not exist.

Whatever is to come, let it come. Whatever is to leave, let it leave. I will not reject even a life of living on alms as defective. Neither do I desire even the state of Brahma. I became all actions.

85. **Question:** Will he worship God?
Answer: He has no worship other than the worship of seeing everything as his own Self.

What I extol everywhere is only my Self. What I worship everywhere as God – that too is only my Self. In all places, sitting, lying down and running are all performed only in my Self. I myself am the enjoyer and that which is enjoyed.

86. **Question:** Is this the experience of all *jnanis*?
Answer: There is no experience other than this experience of the Self.

He who has attained liberation will see, as not different from his Self, all this world that rises in the Self, which remains in the Self, and which merges in the Self. Will he see it as opposed to his Self?

87. **Question:** Will likes and dislikes arise in him?
Answer: As everything has become his Self, they will not arise in him.

For what will he desire? For what will he rise as 'I'? For what will he experience envy and malice? He will dwell as the unmoving support for everything, as the sum of all things animate and inanimate, like the great Meru mountain that is the axis for the seven worlds.

88. **Question:** Will not this experience cease?
Answer: Even if the creations of Iswara falter, this experience will not cease.

Even if the cardinal points change, even if the moon gets burned, fire becomes cold, or the sun travels north to south, the Self-state of the liberated one who has enquired thoroughly into the primal state will not cease.

89. **Question:** How to determine those with such experience?
Answer: They remain unruffled in joy and misery. They should be known by taking this as the hallmark.

Only he is a *jnani* whose mind does not get agitated, who does not identify with and desire [objects] before him, and whose state of purity never wavers whether he lives on alms in poverty or enjoys the illusory state of being Brahma.

90. **Question:** Will they not care for praise and slander?
Answer: No, they will not.

Some may utter praises and worship, or evil and cruel ones may utter words of slander and insult, but the *jnani's* mind will not associate with them. He will remain without thoughts, like the sky that remains the same whether the sun rises or a vast collection of clouds appear.

91. **Question:** What is food for the *jnani*?
Answer: Whatever happens to come to him is food for him.

Whatever enjoyments present themselves to him, and in whatever measure, he will undergo those pleasures. Like the sun that spreads its rays, he will remain free of bondage in the unique and natural state.

92. **Question:** Will not the ego-nature, beginning with desire, touch these *jnanis*?

Answer: As they have attained total destruction of *vasanas*, it will not.

Desire, anger and so on will not touch the liberated one – who has become the form of consciousness and the witness of the world – since he has uprooted and destroyed all the base *vasanas*, and is therefore without *sankalpas*.

93. **Question:** Do they not need to stay in a holy place, or take baths in holy waters, and so on?

Answer: The place where they reside is the holy place. Their look is holy water.

The place where the unique *jivanmukta* – who exists everywhere equally – resides is itself the holy place. His look itself is holy water. The service to his lotus feet is itself liberation.

94. **Question:** What are the eternal attributes of a *jnani*?

Answer: They are soft words, and so on.

They are soft-spoken; their look is free of desire; they experience everything to be *sat* alone; they have a measured gait, and their mind is filled with a joy that never diminishes. The characteristic of a *jnani* is to be ever firm in these.

95. **Question:** What does the *jnani* think?

Answer: There are only thoughts that everything is the Self.

The *jivanmukta* is he who has become one [with the reality] through the experience 'I have seen myself everywhere; I have seen everything in me'; who possesses intensely and clearly the experience of having learned 'unlearning', and who has renounced everything.

96. **Question:** What is proper conduct and what is prohibited conduct for *jnanis*?

Answer: Actions they undertake are proper conduct; actions they abandon are prohibited actions.

For the *jnani* who has become one, tranquil and blemishless, everything, beginning with space [and including the other elements], is his own form. The actions he abandons are prohibited actions, and the actions he takes up are proper actions.

97. **Question:** What are the disciplines and *pujas* for the *jnani*?

Answer: They are meditating on the Self, and so on.

Meditating on consciousness is bathing for a *jnani*. Whatever external appearances he delights in, that is noble discipline. Whatever he obtains as alms and eats without ego, that is his supreme *puja*. His faultless movements are pure *samadhi*.

98. **Question:** The actions that should be performed, and the actions that should be avoided: are these not necessary for *jnanis*?

Answer: As they remain as *Sivam*, they do not exist for them.

To the *jnani* who has become *Sivam*, having seen all the universe as his Self and as the form of consciousness, what is there that should be sifted and rejected, and what is there that should be accepted as proper?

99. **Question:** What is the state attained by those who criticise the conduct of *jnanis*?

Answer: It is the hell of transmigration.

Know that those cruel ones, who view as faulty the life of the *jnani* who has attained supreme bliss, will experience crore upon crore of births like the silkworm that never gets detached from its cocoon.

100. **Question:** What is the benefit obtained by those who worship them?

Answer: It is becoming the non-dual Self.

Those who are able to obtain the grace of the *jnani* – who remains as the eternal, formless, blemishless, blissful and pure

non-dual reality, and for whom everything is his own Self – will become *jnanis*.

101. **Question:** How will the *jnani* shine?

Answer: He will shine as everything and as different from everything.

They have rid themselves of the blemish of the mind; they have rid themselves of the mind; they have rid themselves of the entity within the mind; they have transcended the shore of *jnana*; they have rid themselves of the blissful state of consciousness, the supreme; they have rid themselves of the experience of *Sivam*. They have also rid themselves of all concepts.

The Benefit of Studying this Work

102. Those who are able to enjoy through their two ears the savour of *Sorupa Saram*, which describes the experience attained at the proper stage of ripeness, will be able to see the entire world as their own Self. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS

THE GNOSTIC CYCLE: Towards the Supermind: (2000) comp. and pub. by Srî Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity, Auroville, Pondicherry 605101. pp.liv+207, Rs —.

Srî Aurobindo's writings continue to fascinate us. Because we are living at a time when the wisdom of this saint/mystic/philosopher guides us and directs us how to overcome the prevalent darkness, and arrive at a new spiritual age. No wonder, the present volume which is a compilation from Srî Aurobindo's writings acquires special relevance. Srî Aurobindo wrote extensively; texts like *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine* have enriched the discourses on Indian philosophy. The present volume chooses select portions from some of these classic texts, and emerges as an extremely useful reader for all those who seek to make sense of this extraordinarily gifted prophet–thinker.

Perhaps if we situate ourselves in contemporary times and probe into the discontents of our age, it would be easier to appreciate the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's works. As a matter of fact, there are three disturbing trends that we are witnessing in the modern age. First, modernity, its techno-economic power and its market rationality are creating an utterly restless/violent culture filled with hedonistic principles. It is utilitarian; it rests on aggression, fear and mistrust.

Second, we are seeing the assertion of a terribly exclusivist mind-set that seeks to sanctify itself in the name of a religious dogma or ideology, and gets engaged in an act of annihilation and destruction.

And third, we experience a never-ending conflict between the two — unity and diversity. Unity degenerates into mechanical/ standardized uniformity, and diversity becomes nothing else than cultural retreat, withdrawal and isolation. All these trends seek to negate what many hoped on the eve of the modern *enlightenment:* humankind is moving towards a new age of reason and freedom! This despair causes nihilism, relativism and the postmodern fascination for deconstruction of all grand ideals and projects.

But then, when, amidst this crisis, one begins to read Srî Aurobindo, one sees a new possibility. Modernity, for instance, began with the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. But with its 'objective' analysis and sole emphasis on political-social institutions, it sought to create a new society only by changing its outward/external structure. This, as Sri Aurobindo argued, is a 'mechanical' approach which cannot take us far away. For instance, as history teaches us, modernity witnessed the growth of fascism and degeneration of socialism into state terrorism. What is, therefore, needed is a 'spiritual religion of humanity' that, far from remaining contented with mere external changes, seeks to arouse the spirit of the inner being. Because it is this awakened spirit that alone can celebrate freedom, harmony and equality.

A religion of humanity means the growing realization that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. (pp.113-14)

It is in this context that the distinction that Srî Aurobindo made between

true religion and religionism becomes relevant. How often in our times the spiritual core of religion is lost, and religion emerges merely as a divisive ideology, an outward form of rituals and dogmas. But true religion 'seeks to live in the spirit'; it governs us by 'the higher light and law of the spirit'.

And it is this spiritual religion that can transcend the conflict we witness today: the conflict between unity and diversity. As Srî Aurobindo realized:

If man could realize a perfect spiritual unity, no sort of uniformity would be necessary; for the utmost play of diversity would be securely possible on that foundation. If again he could realize a secure, clear, firmly-held unity in the principle, a rich, even an unlimited diversity in its application might be possible without any fear of disorder, confusion or strife. (p.100).

These lessons, any careful reader would concede, are important. Because we need to realize that commercialism – or seductive consumerism – leads to what Srî Aurobindo regarded as 'barbarism'. And a society like ours that has not yet transcended the 'rajaso-tamasic' stage is far from 'sattvic' qualities like 'calm, wisdom, enlightenment and universal sympathy'. He therefore, inspired us to undertake a journey towards the supermind. And the 'gnostic individual', he hoped, would be the consummation of the spiritual man, because 'all beings would be to him his own selves, all ways and powers of consciousness would be felt as the ways and powers of his own universality'.

A civilization that refuses to cherish higher ideals dies. That is why, a book of this kind ought to be celebrated by all those who are willing to undertake a spiritual journey, and elevate humankind to a higher stage of evolution.

— Avijit Pâthak

[Krama mukti *(spiritual evolution through time)* and sadyômukti *(instantaneous and abiding intuition of ever present perfection)* are the *complementary poles of ancient tradition. The sages enjoin Man to serve society only in order to serve one's own purification. The Maharshi, emphasizing self-knowledge, insisted that the world was quite well cared for, in the hands of the One who created it.*

The commanding presence of non-dual Transcendence, is itself the law of Karma ensuring cosmic balance, and error-free delivery of the cosmic fruit of each agent's motivated action. Seen in this positive perspective, contemporary developments show starkly that the sure stride of ecological-sociological-transcendental Karmic balancing is fully behind the winds of a globalization 'directed' by Techno-economic-political power. When a civilization fosters freedom of spiritual striving, where faith and reason do not take opposing camps with hidden agendas, a Rishi-culture flourishes unified in forest and farm and city cultures, whose wealth in the mundane dimension is a diversity which functions as an immune system. The empowerment arises through enlightened dialogue over internal variations in perspective, vibrant counter-balances, adjustments and collaborations. The sage-tradition has since aeons very successfully embedded through iconic variety, perennial and daily reminders to Man of his transcendent dimension within the warp and woof of mundane strife.

A reductionist attitude which promises that molecule and matter increasingly and irresponsibly manipulated at production and sale, can fulfill longing hearts, is essentially Intellect gone arrogant, manipulating Trust and Faith, and feeling god-like about it. On the one hand we are awed by the fact that computers can improve only by studying brain, and all of Western science's innovations are already found employed efficiently in Nature, and on the other hand we say Nature makes errors and we get busy 'fixing' Her as if we were not involved. We do not see the 'errors' as the mirroring of serious defects in Man's relationship with a holy environment, and

meriting most of all a search within rather than tinkering with a mirror image. Where memories of a transcendent tradition are lost or suppressed in daily life, it is to be expected that the rulers, in the absence of a tradition which by connecting the hearts of the masses rules over the rulers too, will act without sensitivity to the higher dimensions and laws that govern us all. Then the people are driven in a race without sane direction.

*Science scores over stupidity, but spiritual materialism scores over scientific materialism. The latter held out as worthy of any nation's quest and worship, is a dominating energy in developed societies who must also face Karmic cosmic rebalancing, and in the process rise up spiritually healed and benefited. For, such globalization carries threats to economic survival of hitherto passive majorities too, and so must bring to the fore all the powerful counter-balances which lie inherent in ancient civilizations by virtue of their large populations. Their cultural diversity is an immune system, and so rather than precipitating isolated and splintered communities, will provide survival advantage nationally and globally through collaborations in commerce done without loss of the transcendent dimension in culture. Political deals, adjustments and priorities both within a nation and across nations, must yield to such a Rishi-permeated mass. The vibrant cultural memories of a pluralistic populace, and living examples of saints and sages and 'spots' like Ashrams, and media-independent mass-gatherings at ego-dissolving 'black-holes' like Tiru Annâmalai and Kumbh, regardless of religious approach, will necessarily empower that feel for the transcendent dimension inherent in all humans. The empowerment will especially succeed in a culture knit as communities. There is in-built need in all for a fulfilling meaning to existence, beyond life and death as mundane being. It is precipitating in the West a rediscovering and reinterpreting of one's spiritual roots through an increasing resonance with what the East continues to preserve. Materialism 'Eastern brand', too is invading the West through celluloid, music, dance, cuisine, fashion and celebration. But it is materialism found expressed through and inhabited by a mosaic of symbols rich in the relevance of the Transcendent dimension in daily life. As to the 'less developed' East lapping up the West's idea of globalization, the culture-empowered connections with the transcendent, — for reasons that extend from Man's need for boons from his God to make more pleasant one's mundane strife in the here and in the hereafter, and all the way through a purification in action, on to the need for self-knowledge or divine union —, will surely provide many very creative individuals and communities, both rich and poor among a vast population, that inner sense of direction, restraint and psychic balance every time one receives a 'beep' from the greedy consumerism in the globalizing of the times. —**J.J.**]*.

OTHER BOOKS

VACHANÂMRUTHAM: (*Talks with Ramana Maharshi;* first part covering Talk *1-239).* Malayalam tr. by Saraswati S. Warrier. ISBN81-240-1272-5. Distributor: Current Books, Kottayam, Kerala. p224, Rs95

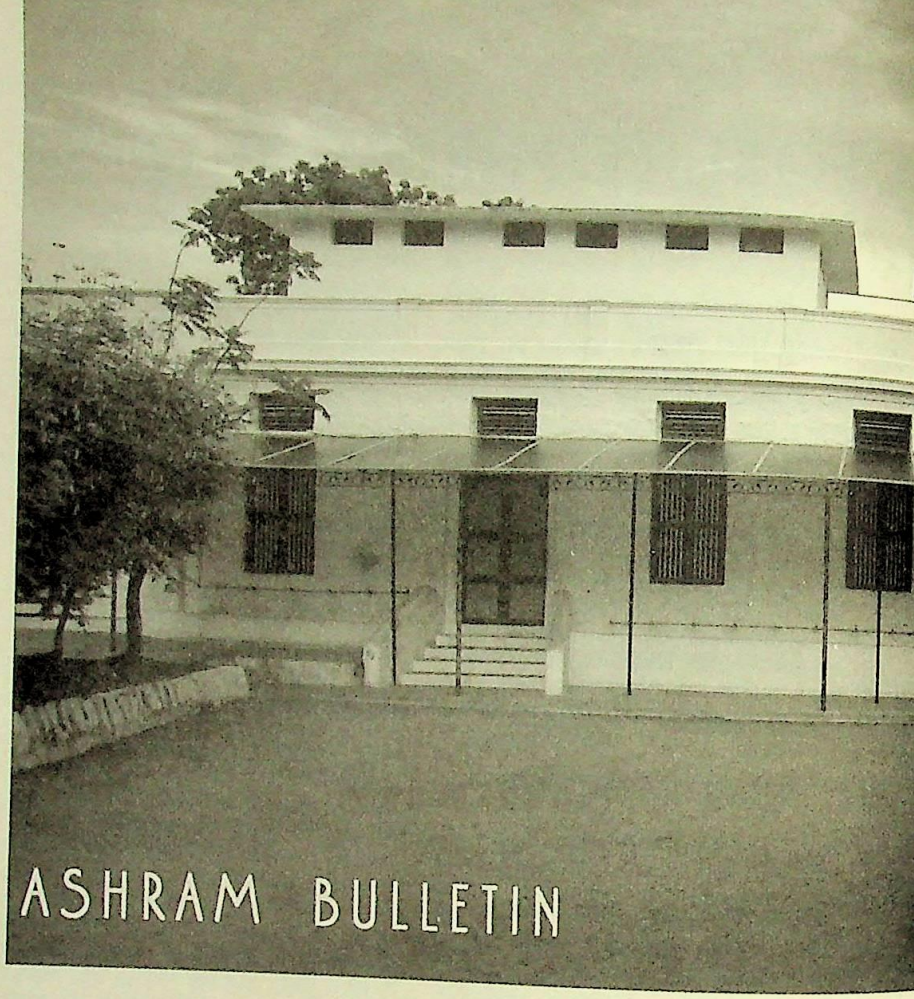
VÂRTÂLÂP: (*Talks;* Gujarati transl. by RT Vyas). Pub: Ramakrishna Seva Samiti, LG Hospital Rd, Ahmedabad 380008. pp670, Rs.200.

SHAMBHÔMÛRTIH (Sanskrit biography of the Kânchi Mahâswâmi): by Avadhâni Janârdhanânanda Swâmi; Tamil transl. by R. Bâlakrishna Sâstrigal). Pub: Kânchi Kâmakôti Pîtham, 1 Avenue Rd, Kânchipuram. pp106, Rs?

PRÂNÂYÂMA: A conscious way of breathing: Ranjit Sen Gupta. 2003. New Age Books, A-44, Naraina Phase-1, Delhi 110028 <nab@vsnl.in> pp140, Rs195 [*Physiology of breathing is well covered. Essence of Yoga and Prana, variations of Prânâyâma, and training charts for daily sâdhana are covered with an eye on simplicity*].

FORTHCOMING FESTIVALS

Sri Vidya Havan	Thursday	29.01.2004
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Friday	06.02.2004
Maha Shivaratri	Wednesday	18-02-2004
Telugu New Year Day	Sunday	21-03-2004
Sri Rama Navami	Tuesday	30-03-2004
Tamil New Year Day	Tuesday	13.04.2004
Sri Bhagavan's Aradhana	**Saturday**	**17.04.2004**
Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)	**Friday**	**11.06.2004**
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Friday	02.07.2004
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Wednesday	01.09.2004
Krishna Jayanti (Gokulashtami)	Monday	06.09.2004
Vinayaka Chaturthi	Saturday	18.09.2004
Navaratri Festival commences	**Thursday**	**14.10.2004**
Vijayadasami	Saturday	23.10.2004
Deepavali	Friday	12.11.2004
Karthigai Festival commences	Wednesday	17.11.2004
Karthigai Deepam	Friday	26.11.2004
Sri Bhagavan's 125th Jayanti	**Tuesday**	**28.12.2004**



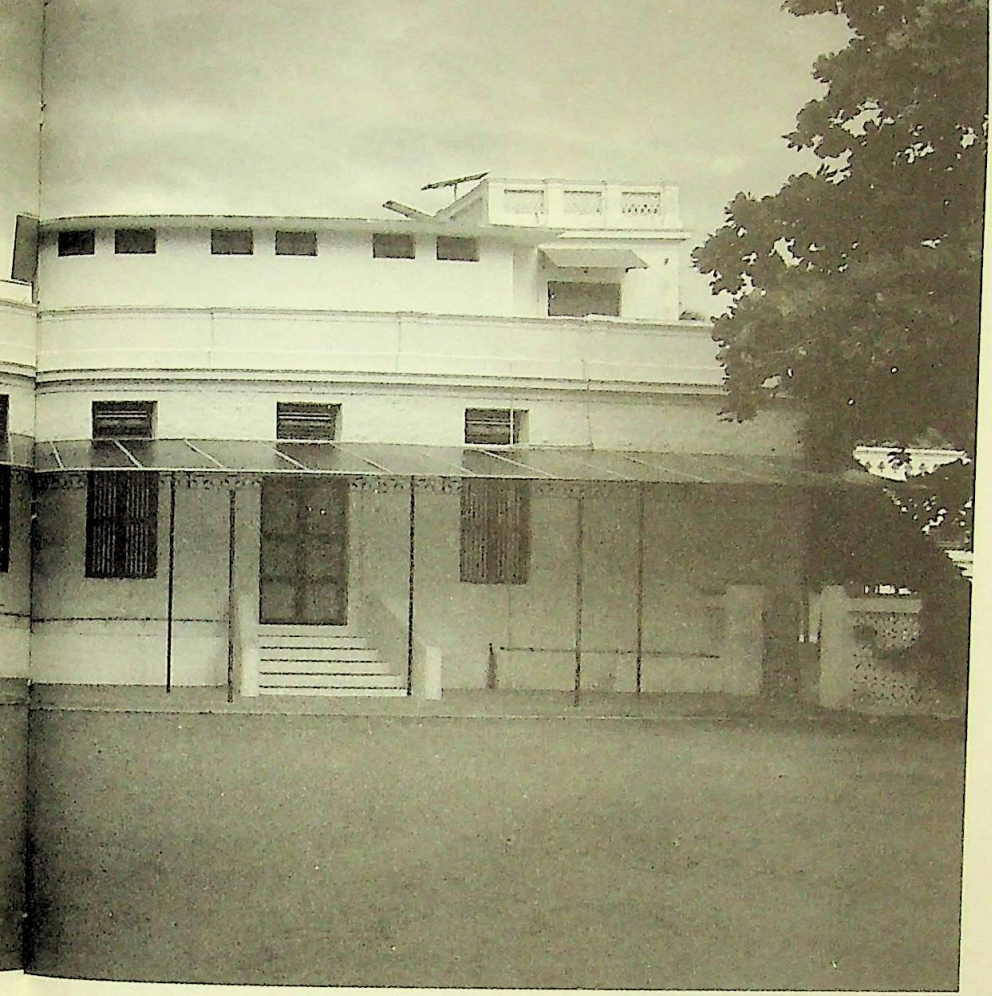
ASHRAM BULLETIN

Deepam

The Kartikai Deepam festival is one of the grandest and majestic festivals celebrated in India. It is a ten day festival and this year it began on 28th November with flag hoisting. The various chariots each day draw huge crowds. The Silver Bull Mount on the 5th day and the main chariot on the 7th day are considered very important. The grand finale on the evening of 7th December was the lighting of the Deepam on the summit of the Arunachala hill.

The ashram has initiated a major project to video the entire Deepam festival. The project began two years ago and we expect that with the filming of this year's Deepam, there is enough material to produce a high quality video of at least two hours showing every aspect of the rituals and proceedings at the Arunachaleswara temple, around the hill, the summit of the hill, the people, etc., along with the significance of the festival.

Devotees will be informed as soon as the video is available. It is likely to take another six to eight months.



125th Jayanti Year
Ratha Yatra (Chariot Journey)

Sincere devotees of Bhagavan expressed their wish that the 125th year of Bhagavan's Jayanti be utilised to share the simple but profound message of his teachings.

Devotees from Rajapalayam in South Tamilnadu put forward the idea of a 'Sri Ramana Jnana Ratham' which would carry propogate the teachings of Bhagavan to a large number of aspirants throughout Tamilnadu, and parts of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Ramanalaya, Rajapalayam has agreed to be in-charge of this yatra.

The ratha will start from Tiruchuli, the birth place of Sri Bhagavan around 17th July 2004 (Punarvasu Day). Travelling through many towns in Tamilnadu the ratha will reach Tiruvannamalai town on 24th August 2004 and will be carried on giripradakshina daily with groups of devotees upto the 1st of September. The yatra will travel approximately 3000 km. Devotees and friends desirous of participating and extending a helping hand in various aspects of this

Ratha Yatra, and providing the needed facilities for the smooth functioning, may contact **Sri Lokanatha Raja, "Sri Ramanalayam", 25-J, Alaguthankulam Road, Madasami Koil St., Rajapalayam 626117. Phone: 04563-231258 or Sri Chandramouli, Cell No: 94432-37200.**

Tentative Dates and Route for the Ratha

17th July 2004: Tiruchuli, Aruppukottai & Virudhunagar;
18th R. R. Nagar, Kovilpatti & Tirunelveli; - 2 days;
20th Tuticorin & Tiruchendur;
21st Sattankulam, Tandupattu & Kanyakumari;
22nd Nagercoil, Valliyur, Nanguneri, Cheranmahadevi & Ambasamudram;
23rd Sencottai, Tenkasi & Kutralam;
24th Vasudevanallur & Rajapalayam - 2 days;
26th Srivilliputhur & Madurai;
27th Dindigul;
28th Palani, Udumulpet & Pollachi;
29th Palghat;
30th Coimbatore - 2 days;
1st August: Avinashi & Tirupur;
2nd Perundurai & Erode - 2 days;
4th Karur;
5th Trichy - 2 days;
7th Tanjore;
8th Tiruvaiyaru & Kumbhakonam;
9th Aathur & Salem - 2 days;
11th Dharmapuri & Krishnagiri;
12th Vaniyambadi & Gudiyattam;
13th Chittoor - 2 days;
15th Vellore, Walajapet & Kanchipuram - 2 days;
17th Sriperumpudhur & Chennai - 3 days;
21st Chengleput, Wandavasi, Desur & Thellar;
22nd Tindivanam & Pondicherry;
23rd Villupuram;
24th Tirukoilur, Tiruvannamalai. Thence giripradakshina with thousands of devotees upto 1st September.

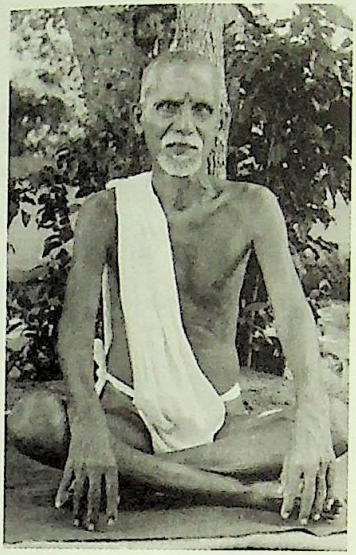
A more detailed programme of the Ratha Yatra will be published in the next issue of *The Mountain Path*.

The focus for the Ratha Yatra would be chanting of Sri Bhagavan's Aksharamanamalai on Arunachala by thousands of devotees enroute. There will be prior supply of folders containing the above, life and teachings of Sri Bhagavan and the importance of giripradakshina, to all devotees in the above places who wish to participate.

Annamalai Swami Ashram

When Annamalai Swami left Sri Ramanasramam in 1938, he stayed in the adjacent land at Palakothu which was a sadhu's colony. Many Ramana devotees such as Munagala Venkataramiah, Kunju Swami, and Paul Brunton lived there. Later, Annamalai Swami developed an ashram and a Trust. He attained samadhi in November 1995. His mortal remains were buried inside his ashram. He himself had constructed his samadhi during his lifetime.

Annamalai Swami's close attendant Sundaram assumed responsibility for the maintenance of



the ashram along with a Board of Trustees. Recently in August this year, Sundaram, with the agreement of the Annamalai Swami Board of Trustees, decided to hand over the Trust and properties to Sri Ramanasramam. It is proposed to use the new extension for the accommodation of visiting devotees. The ashram will also maintain Annamalai Swami's *samadhi* shrine.

Proposed Water Projects

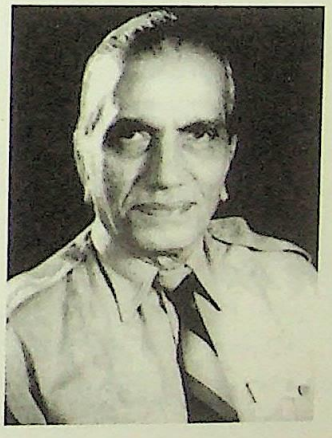
There has been an unusually steady rainfall in the past few months. The local farmers are happy and all available agricultural land is being utilised to the maximum.

Though rainfall has been bountiful the ashram is currently considering the feasibility of improving water harvesting and recycling of water. A new water filtration system is being considered for drinking purposes.

Since Tiruvannamalai district has exceptionally hard water, the present water softener machinery and purifier devices used to steam cook rice in the kitchen are due for an overhaul in order to improve the quality of water as well conservation of energy.

Obituary

Dr. R. M. Masurkar, a devotee of Sri Bhagavan passed away on September 26th at Kumta, aged 86. He was a compassionate medical practitioner and a skilled surgeon. He received Sri Bhagavan's darshan in 1948 and thereafter visited the ashram many times.



In 1968 at Kumta he founded the *Ramana Seva Sangha*. He was also the founder editor of *Sri Ramana Sandesha*, a Kannada quarterly dedicated to Sri Bhagavan and his teachings. A natural leader and speaker, he held *sat sanghs* every week and was instrumental in developing awareness of Sri Bhagavan in his area. The Ramana *bhaktas* of Kumta are greatly saddened by his demise. ▲

AFTERWORD

A MORALITY TALE

(perhaps we don't always know better)

A priest lived in a small village near a huge dam which one day burst and started a serious flood. In spite of the general panic a bullock cart stopped at his house and offered a tiny space to the priest among all the family members, animals and utensils.

"No, no," said the priest. "You save yourselves. I put my trust in God. I have performed *pujas* and done tapas all my life and now God Himself will protect me."

The flood waters continued to rise and the priest moved up to the top floor of his house. A boat passed and stopped for him. There was not much room but he was welcome to squeeze in with the chickens and coconuts.

The priest declined and gave his reasons as before. The boat rowed away and the flood waters rose still further. He eventually had to sit on the roof to avoid being swept away.

A helicopter flew past with relief workers on board. They lowered a rope ladder and shouted through a bullhorn.

"Grab hold and we will pull you to safety."

"No, no," said the priest again. "Save those who need it more than me. I am under the direct protection of God. He will save me Himself."

The waters rose steadily and the priest was drowned.

He was very angry when, after his death, he went to face Lord Siva.

"Oh Lord", he exclaimed, "You saved all those worthless people, but I alone put all my faith and trust in you and you let me drown. Why is this?"

Lord Siva looked at the priest. "I sent you a bullock cart," he said. "Then I sent you a boat and finally I even sent a helicopter. Can I help it if you are too blind to recognise my help when it comes to you?"

▲

RECENT ASHRAM PUBLICATIONS

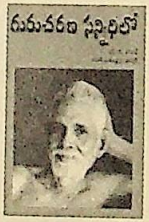
Pranimitra Bhagavan Ramanar (Tamil)

This is Part One of a two part series. The narration is in the form of dialogue. It chronicles Bhagavan's unique relationship with animals and contains about 30 photos of Bhagavan with cows printed on foriegn art paper. Pages: PP. 65; Price: Rs.40

Ramanopanishad (Telugu)

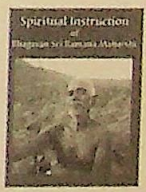
Contains the translation of the third part of "Experience of the Truth" from Muruganar's *The Garland of Guru's Sayings* by Prof K. Swaminathan. Translated by Donepudi Venkaiah. Pages: PP. 60; Price: Rs.20

Guru Charana Sannidilo (Telugu)



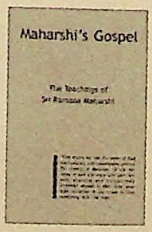
Telugu translation of S. S. Cohen's *Guru Ramana* and *A Sadhu's Reminiscences* by Major Chadwick have been jointly published. Translation has been done by Sonti Anusuyamma. Pages: PP. 246; Price: Rs.55

Spiritual Instructions - Pocket Edn., (English)



A pocket edition of this valuable book containing the principle teaching of Bhagavan edited by Arthur Osborne. Pages: PP. 63; Price: Rs.10

Maharshi's Gospel - Hardbound Edn., (English)



A hardbound edition of Bhagavan's teaching in question and answer format grouped under different subjects. Pages: PP. 78; Price: Rs.40

Available from:

Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam, Sri Ramanasramam PO, Tiruvannamalai 606603.

(Postage and packing charges extra)

"As long as there are tendencies towards sense-objects (*vishaya-vasanas*) in the mind, so long the enquiry 'Who am I?' is necessary. As and when thoughts rise, one should annihilate all of them through enquiry then and there in their very place of origin. Not attending to what-is-other (*anya*, that is, to any second or third person object) is non-attachment (*vairagya*) or desirelessness (*nirasa*); not leaving Self is knowledge (*jnana*)."

— Sri Ramana Maharshi in *Who am I?*